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Things of the Spirit

by

Rev. P. J. Hoekenga

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THINGS *of the* SPIRIT

Meditations on Spiritual Life
and Prayer

BY

REV. P. J. HOEKENGA

With Introduction by REV. I. VAN DELLEN.

EERDMANS-SEVENSMA CO.
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"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

"Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

1 Cor. 2: 12-14

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JUL 14 1920

E.A.W. July 28, 20.

PREFATORY NOTE

This little book contains no technical treatise, but practical Meditations on Spiritual Life and Prayer.

They have appeared in THE BANNER *in the years 1917 to 1919, with the exception of the eleventh Meditation. A few changes have been made to make them more suitable for publication in book form.*

The title, which covers the two subjects of the Meditations, is taken from I Cor. 2: 12-14, and the thought expressed in those verses of Scripture runs through every page of the book.

The appearance of the book is largely due to repeated requests for a reprint of these Meditations; and the author is thankful for the assurance from several believers, that his humble efforts to write on "Things of the Spirit" have been a blessing to many.

May the Lord be pleased to make his message contained in these pages, a blessing for many others.

P. J. HOEKENGA

Ripon, California,
Christmas, 1919.

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INTRODUCTION

It affords me great pleasure to introduce these Meditations on "Things of the Spirit" by the Rev. P. J. Hoekenga.

These "practical thoughts," as they are styled by the writer himself, remind me of some of the works of our old spiritual advisers as Brakel and others. For various reasons their books are not understood any more by the present generation. This fact may be deplored, but it cannot be denied. And now we need something which may take their place. We need guidance in the things treated in this volume. And it seems to me that the writer of these pages has succeeded in impressing on us the need of sounder and deeper spiritual life, and that his instructions and admonitions may be the means of teaching us "how to exercise all the functions of the renewed soul to the honor of God."

Especially our young people should profit by perusing this series. I would suggest that consistories and parents present this volume to them upon public confession of faith.

May the Lord bless these studies to the upbuilding of his Church.

I. VAN DELLEN

PART I

THOUGHTS ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

"To be spiritually minded is life and peace."
Rom. 8: 6

"Teach me, O Lord, thy way of truth,
And from it I will not depart;
That I may steadfastly obey,
Give me an understanding heart."
Ps. 119.

I

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL LIFE?

"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3: 6

There was a time when spiritual life was over-emphasized. About two hundred years ago, and a little less, one book after another was written on such subjects as "The Spiritual Man;" and also the preaching in churches of the Reformed type was much along the line of experimental Christianity." As always, this extremely strong emphasis which was placed upon something which is essentially right, led to many wrong theories and practices. In some circles a very unwholesome atmosphere pervaded under the name of "experimental Christianity" and "spiritual life," and before long the very opposite of true spirituality was often predominant. Extremes always lead to opposite extremes. The history of the church proves, through many right things which turned out wrong, that it is always necessary to be mindful of the injunction of Scripture, "Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

The trouble with some people when they read the admonitions of Scripture concerning spiritual life, is, that they have a wrong conception of what it means to be spiritually minded. Spiritual life, with some people, is an artificial thing. It is put on, like one puts on a cloak. This is not always deliberate hypocrisy on their part. It is often a fundamental misunderstanding, which, under the influence of the carnal human mind, leads to an unspiritual spirituality, and often makes such people obnoxious to their fellow-christians as well as to the world. Nothing does more harm than the hot-bed variety of spiritual life; the plant that is forced to grow, and which has not the true vitality.

Now, as it is undoubtedly true, that we live in an age of declension of spiritual life, which makes it necessary—highly

necessary, indeed—to put greater emphasis on spiritual life, it seems best to first find out **what is meant by spiritual life.** A deepening and widening of spiritual life is something greatly needed by God's people individually and by the church as a whole, but—lest we err with respect to the nature and character of this life—we must have a clear, Scriptural conception of what is meant by spiritual life.

* * * * *

What then is **Spiritual Life?** Let us see.

All creature is either dead or alive. There are therefore two classes of creatures.

Creatures having no life are said to have inanimate existence, while the others, the living creatures, have animate existence. Man belongs to the latter class.

Yet man is from all other animate creatures distinguished in a wonderful way, in that he has a **two-fold life.** He has physical life, like plants and animals, but he also has spiritual life. Man is wonderfully made in the image of God. He is body and soul. Flesh and blood, imbued with the physical life that is common to other animate creatures. And spirit, imparted to him directly from God, which makes him a "living soul" (Gen. 2: 7), and which makes him to be preëminently "the offspring of God" (Acts 17: 29). And this two-fold life of man belongs to God, who made him. Man truly lives when the functions of body and soul are properly exercised, which means that his whole being and all his actions must find their goal in God. The capability to exercise the functions of the body in a proper way constitutes the **physical life.** The capability to exercise the functions of the soul in a proper way constitutes the **spiritual life.**

If nothing had interrupted the exerices of these functions of body and soul, there would be no need of "greater emphasis on spiritual life." Body and soul were properly related to one another and all the functions were adjusted right, so that the whole man did **truly live.** But sin interrupted the exercise of these functions of body and soul and turned their activity away from God. Sin deprived man of the capability of exercising these functions toward the proper end, and so "death came by sin, and passed upon all men" (Rom. 5: 12). Spiritual and physical death entered into the world when sin

came in. Man has still a body, but its functions are no longer properly exercised. Man is not soulless, but the life of that soul is no longer a spiritual life. With respect to its proper functions and its true aim that life is gone: man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2: 1, 5; Col. 2: 13). The distorted functions of his soul are being exercised "according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2: 2); he "minds the things of the flesh" (Rom. 8: 5).

So then, man by nature, through sin, has neither the desire nor the capability to live a spiritual life. Consequently it would be utter folly to tell such a person that he has need of greater emphasis on spiritual life. What he needs first is that life itself restored. Spiritual things cannot even be understood by the carnal mind because "they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2: 14). The spiritual faculties and the spiritual sense must be restored before man can entertain spiritual ideas and aims. And this restoration is described in Scripture as a distinct and specific creation of God the Holy Spirit, a giving of new life (Eph. 2: 1, 5; John 3: 3-6).

* * * * *

When speaking of Spiritual Life, we refer therefore to the capability of exercising those functions of the soul, which were supernaturally renewed by the Holy Spirit, and by which the sinner who was dead in trespasses and sin, has become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Every true Christian has received this spiritual life. He can never lose it, for God never forsakes his own work. Generally speaking therefore, all Christians are spiritual people.

But the possession of spiritual life and living a spiritual life is not quite the same thing. The Bible repeatedly warns those who have received this spiritual life, against the danger of "walking after the flesh." This new life is sometimes under the influence of the carnal mind. Also there are many spiritual diseases, that will fasten themselves like parasites upon the new life, thereby weakening the capability of the renewed soul to exercise its proper functions. Though spiritual life as such is never lost, the spiritual apprehension, and the spiritually mindedness is easily lost. Then spiritual life is not lived, it is not active.

When we say, that there is need of greater emphasis on

spiritual life, we do not refer to the need of an **analyzation** of this life itself; we refer to the need of more **realization of** this life, both as to our subjective consciousness of it, and the actual revelation of that life in our Christian conduct. On that point there is a great lack in our days, as we shall see in the subsequent pages. Too much uncertainty as to whether we have this spiritual life. And this is largely due, I fear, to the fact that there is so little real spiritual ambition; so little fervent desire to glorify God in our body and spirit, which are his; so little humble **fear of God,** which is true spirituality.

And then, we should also remember, that God does not want us to be stationary in our spiritual life. We must **increase in godliness.** We must become more intimate with God and more devoted to his cause. As no man can go to the fountain and drink once for all, and take water enough for his whole life, so we also cannot live on grace once received; we must constantly go back to the source of life. Thus our spiritual life will become more and more **the normal exerices of the renewed functions of our soul.** We will experience that "He giveth more grace," and that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

II

BEWARE OF SUBSTITUTES

"But watch thou in all things."
2 Tim. 4: 5

All good things are imitated. Or cheaper substitutes are offered in place of them.

This is especially true of religious things. The very nature and value of religious things and of spiritual realities of religious things invites imitation. Not only does the devil try to imitate spiritual things, but also people do so. And very often Christians will accept a substitute for the real thing. This is so also with respect to spiritual life, as al-

ready stated previously. It is against some of the substitutes that I wish to sound a warning of Paul to Timothy.

A professor of Princeton Seminary speaks of three distinctive types of Christianity. Corresponding to the three faculties of the soul, intellect, will and feeling, he designates them as **intellectual, action and experiential types.** As one of the three faculties predominates, Christians will belong to one of the three types. If our faculties are all properly balanced, as they should be, we will not belong to any particular class, however. But the fact remains, that nearly every Christian is leaning strongly toward one or the other of the three. And consequently his spiritual life is affected to no small degree. Yea, quite often one of those three types is looked upon as if it were what the Bible speaks of as spiritual life; and thus a very **one-sided spiritual attitude** is taken as a **substitute** for real spiritual life.

This is a dangerous thing, and therefore to be guarded against. True spiritual life, as we have seen, is the capability and proper exercise of **all** the functions of the soul. So soon as one of them predominates over the others, the proper spiritual balance is lacking and spiritual life is no longer normal. In order to live the true, biblical kind of spiritual life we must not be one of any of the three types of Christians mentioned above, but our intellect, will and feeling must be properly blended into wholehearted devotion to God, which makes us a living sacrifice before Him. Read 2 Tim. 3: 16, 17.

* * * * *

Beware of the **intellectual type** of Christianity. The intellect is a powerful means of knowing God and of leading up to a real, healthy spiritual life, but nothing will do more mischief to one's spiritual life than **relying** upon the intellect. None are more vain, conceited and pleased with themselves than the Christians who think that **knowing a few things** is of principle importance. It is usually through the intellect that the devil does most of his mischief, and he does it also among Christian people along that line. Of course, I do not wish to detract one item from the importance of the intellect in relation to Christianity in general, and to true spiritual life in particular, but I mean to say, that Christianity is more than a fine theory, and real spiritual life is infinitely more

than clear, intellectual conceptions of the doctrines of salvation.

Even the most orthodox type of Christianity is not to be confused with genuine spirituality. I fear that orthodoxy makes many of our people an easy prey of the devil, for not a few boast of their orthodoxy, while their life does show very little, if any, of "a faith working through love," and humbly devoted to the cause of Christ.

Intellect may be properly called the starting point of genuine spiritual life, but it must never be considered to be its completion. God grant, that our Christian people may become more intelligent with respect to "the faith one delivered to the saints," but let us never think that a highly intelligent Christian is also of necessity a truly spiritual Christian. For when the intellect is strongly developed without being placed under the proper control of a humble faith, it will at best be a counterfeit of spirituality; it never is that spiritual mindedness, which is "life and peace."

* * * * *

Beware also of the experiential type of Christianity. Much of so-called experiences and feelings are often merely imaginations run wild. Nothing looks so much like spiritual life than does much of this experiential type of Christianity, while in reality nothing is so little like it. A great deal of this kind of spirituality is merely put on; it is pretended and not real at all. And another great deal of it is the result of a religiously unbalanced mind. God does not want us to be unreasonably spiritual. "We have a reasonable service," says Paul. And we should remember that true spiritual life manifests itself in humbly serving God. Serving Him not necessarily in an unusual way, but serving Him in the quietude of our own home and in the common walks of life.

This experiential type of Christianity is marked by a strong tendency to let the world drift to perdition, without so much as turning a finger for the salvation of sinners. The admonition to be "separate from the world" is taken as if it meant, that we must have nothing to do with the world in any way. This idea has led some people to go out into a desert and live the life of a recluse, and others have shut themselves up in monastaries. And today this same idea

leads some people to shun everything that pertains to the ordinary things of social and economical life. They think that piety and spirituality consists in being religious indifferent as to what becomes of the world and the things of the world. And to them the highest degree of spiritual life is to live in a state of rapturous exaltation, in which the present, earthly conditions are forgotten. Their so-called spirituality often borders on madness.

The trouble with these people is, that they do not remember why God has put his children in the world. God put us in the world, not to live a worldly life, but to live a true spiritual life in the midst of a "crooked and perverse people." As a writer says: "It is more to the honor of a Christian soldier by faith to overcome the world, than by a monastical vow to retreat from it, and more to the honor of Christ to serve Him in a city than in a cell." We shall never have a robust, strong, joyful spiritual life till we get out of this artificial, unnatural piety, and out of the narrow considerations of man-made spirituality.

There is a place for solitariness in the true spiritual life, to be sure. We shall speak of that later. But as Christ did not pray to the Father to have his people taken out of the world, but to keep them from the evil (John 17: 13), so we must pray that by his grace we may live a spiritual life, while performing the common duties of life.

What we need in order to be more spiritual is a firm grasp by faith upon the things eternal, and a clear view of their glorious reality and unlimited value. If we seek that, we shall obtain it, and having that, we can face the world and take our part in every-day life without the danger of being defiled thereby.

* * * * *

Though I have urged you to think of spiritual life as a life full of action, yet I must also say: Beware of the action type of Christianity. By that I mean a type of Christianity which substitutes various religious activities for "faith working through love."

I fear that this action type is the prevailing type of Christianity in our days. Under the motto of "practical Chris-

tianity," and similar terms, we are confronted with a form of unspiritual and often unchristian Christianity, which is playing havoc everywhere. Doing this and that and the other thing is considered to be genuine Christianity and consequently the highest type of spiritual life. People are running their legs off nowadays to do certain things, which they themselves, or others, claim to be "of utmost religious importance," which in reality it has often nothing at all to do with our specific duties as Christians, or it is at the most only some little fruit of Christian love.

At any rate, all that any man can ever do cannot take the place of that wholehearted devotion to God, which makes us an entire and living sacrifice for God, and which is true spiritual life. Spiritual life is not the doing of a thing merely, but it is the attitude of the soul toward God, which also prompts to doing, but which does not say much about what it has done. The action type of Christianity is often full of self-righteousness. It is trying to make a compromise between God and the sinful heart, and would satisfy the justice of God by a few small actions, which it considers of great value, while the Lord has said, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." To live spiritually is to exercise all the functions of the soul, both outwardly and inwardly, toward God and in fellowship with Him.

III

THE NORMAL GROWTH OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. Proper Food

"As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." 1 Pet. 2: 2

When one puts emphasis on Spiritual Life, it is of utmost importance that he clearly understands what Spiritual Life actually is, otherwise he may unknowingly and unintentionally emphasize a substitute and do more harm than good.

We have seen what Spiritual Life is and what it is not. It is not a pious consideration of heaven and heavenly things merely, nor does it consist in being very serious and in talking much about the wickedness of the world and the holiness of God. It is not any special type of Christianity, and least of all that type which makes a pretense of being particularly spiritual. No Spiritual Life—let us not forget it—is nothing more and nothing less than a life in which all the faculties of the soul are properly blended into wholehearted devotion to God.

Another thing that must be remembered well is, that Spiritual Life is **from above**, that it is a creation of the Holy Spirit, by which a sinner who is dead in trespasses and sin becomes a new creature, and is by virtue of that divine recreation of his soul capable to exercise the functions of his soul properly. The fact that this truth is often overlooked accounts for a great deal of false spirituality, and for not a little spiritual misery. There are too many wrong conceptions of what Spiritual Life is. Remember, a **spiritual man** is a man renewed and enlightened by the Spirit; he has **spiritual life** in contrast with the former carnal life. And **spiritual living** is to live in conformity with the character and purpose of this spiritual life.

As all other life, **Spiritual Life is destined to grow.** Life cannot be stagnant. It goes down if it does not grow up. It gets weaker if it does not grow stronger. In emphasizing Spiritual Life we should especially emphasize this fact, that **it must grow.** It must increase and expand. It must grow deeper and broader. Knowledge, righteousness and holiness must increase, both inwardly and outwardly. The spiritual man must not be satisfied with the assurance that Jesus is his and that he goes to heaven by and by; he must seek to grow in order "that the man of God may be perfect, furnished completely unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 17).

And this normal growth of Spiritual Life is made possible by God. He has made special provision for it. Its growth is not acquired by acting more spiritual, or trying to be more spiritual. Spiritual Life needs the proper **food** and **air**, which God has ordained for it. The nourishment of the Word of God, and the atmosphere of the presence of God: these are

needed for the growth of Spiritual Life. This must be emphasized.

* * * * *

The Word of God is Food. It is the only food for the normal growth of Spiritual Life. Throughout the Bible we are taught to "eat" the Word of God, and to "drink" it; and the increase and normal growth of Spiritual Life is conditional upon the proper and regular use of the Word of God. It is the never-failing storehouse of spiritual nourishment, and if you wish your Spiritual Life to grow, you must turn away from all food substitutes and subsist on the Word of God entirely. Assimilate the Word of God, believers. Search the Scriptures; dig deep into them. God speaks through his Word. The Holy Spirit works through God's Word. So then you must read it thoughtfully, systematically, reverently, believingly and prayerfully. If you would grow in the grace and knowledge of the truth, and in Spiritual Life, do not read your Bible in any other way than this. "Receive with meekness the engrafted Word." Put all confidence in it; have all expectation from it. Get steeped in Scripture. Get saturated through with the divine Word of God.

Just read what a few men of God testify concerning the Bible as food for their spiritual life. Jeremiah, the prophet of sorrow, says: "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me joy and rejoicing of my heart" (15: 16). Job declares, "I have esteemed the word of his mouth more than my necessary food" (23: 12). The Psalmist prays, "Strengthen Thou me according to thy word" (119: 28), and he declares also, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea sweeter than honey to my mouth" (119: 103). And one of the clearest admonitions and assurances concerning the Word of God as food for Spiritual Life, is found in 1 Peter 2: 2: "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

More of the Bible is what is needed. There is no food scarcity with God, but we must come to the storehouse of God to obtain our full rations. Spiritual Life is weak and waning in many instances, because people live on short rations; they use substitutes, instead of the sincere milk of the word, the unadulterated food.

What is true of personal and individual searching and assimilation of Scripture, is also appliable to the **preaching of the Word.** Preachers are in a certain sense food distributors. They are to "handle" the Word of God. They are the "stewards" of the Lord, by Him "made ruler over his household, to **give them their portion of meat** in due season;" and the Lord expects them to be diligent in doing so (Matt. 24: 45; Luke 12: 42). Now it is a sad fact, that many people do not want the proper food dished up for them in the preaching, but I fear it also is a sad fact, that many who do want it, **do not get it.** And the greater fault lies with the preacher, for it is his business to be "**so doing.**" He must give food to the souls. Food in a way in which they can assimilate it.

I sometimes fear that some orthodox preachers are more Bible analysts than "ministers of the Word." They are more engaged in showing people the costly stones of the temple of Reformed doctrine than in leading people to the inner court, to hear the voice of God. Some preaching seems to be rather formal and cold, and not very well suited to whet the spiritual appetite and to nourish spiritual life. When Peter's commission to be the Lord's ambassador was renewed, he was told three times to **feed** the Lord's flock. And he was to feed both, the **lambs** and the **sheep** (John 21: 15-17). This is very significant. The preacher's business is primarily to feed those entrusted to his care. And the food is the Word of God. A little less of the spices of human reasoning and more of the Bible would be better in many instances. It would promote the growth of Spiritual Life. Man can't improve upon God's own regulations. It is not simply the question whether it is true what we preach; it is also the question whether it is **food.** People must be led to the sanctuary of God's holy Word, and we must endeavor to make them sit down and **eat** and **drink.** Surely, a preacher must be a thorough and logical exponent of the Bible, but again, he must educate his people toward true Spirituality; he must cultivate that insight in the truth, which sees more than the smooth surface of logic and sound reasoning; he must not merely be intellectually energetic, but spiritually minded, and his aim must be to lead his people to a fuller

consecration of their whole being to the God of their salvation.

Jesus, speaking of scribes who are "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," says, that they are "like unto a man that is an householder which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. 13: 32). The "treasure" refers to what by diligent and consecrated study of the Word of God he has acquired and can offer the others; "new and old things" refers to the variety and abundance of the truth stored away. The whole has reference, of course, to the Word of God. And the fact that he is likened unto an "householder" is a very clear and forceful indication of the fact, that he must bring forth these new and old things in the form of food, for the word denotes a man who has charge of the household, and particularly has reference to his duty to supply every member of the household with proper food. Surely, ministers of the Gospel should consider this very seriously. They are to feed the people. They must feed them with the Word, that they may be educated unto spirituality, and that their Spiritual Life may grow.

IV

THE NORMAL GROWTH OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

2. Proper Atmosphere

"It is good for me to draw near to God:
I have put my trust in the Lord God."
Ps. 73: 28

As we have seen, all life is dependent for its normal growth upon two things: proper food and proper air. These two are equally important. A plant in rich soil, but in a place where it lacks light and sunshine, will not grow normally and cannot yield fruit. The same is true of a plant which is put in a good atmosphere, but which is not rooted in good soil. This rule also holds with respect to our physical life. Our bodies need nourishing food, but also healthy air

and sunshine. Deprive them of one of the two and the result will soon be evident.

Now, this is even more true with respect to Spiritual Life. The spiritual finds its type in the material and physical. Or, to speak with Drummond, the natural law applies to the spiritual world. Spiritual Life needs the Word of God for food, as we saw previously. And it needs the **presence of God for the atmosphere.** It cannot thrive and become strong and vigorous unless it lives in the presence of God. A soul may be fed on the best of food, properly prepared and presented, but Spiritual Life will not grow normally unless that soul lives in God's presence. It must breath the air of heaven.

It needs no argument to show that a great many Christians are not living close to God. Evidently many professed Christians live a great distance away from God. They are not in spiritual touch with Him. Ah, I fear that most Christians are out of the clear sunshine of the presence of God. To say the least, most Christians are not near unto God. And consequently, their Spiritual Life is weak; they falter along, and many of them fall faint by the wayside. Alas, not a few are "greatly diminished" in strength, and would fall away entirely if not the "gifts and the calling of God were without repentance."

* * * * *

What is the reason that many of God's children do not live in the proper spiritual atmosphere? Why are they not "near unto God"? Why are they living on the mere surface of Christian life? Why are they not growing in Spiritual Life?

Alas, many Christians do not seem to know what is the reason. They are not satisfied with their condition. They often wish it were different. They are, perhaps, often praying for an increase of Spiritual Life. Yet, they do not seem to know where the real trouble lies. In fact, many of them seem to think that perhaps God has so willed it, that their Spiritual Life remains weak and dwarfed.

The trouble with many of God's children is the same as it was with one of my dear brethren in Christ, who once wrote

to me: "Oh, if God would reveal himself to me once more; but he seems so far away." I wrote him back as I am writing now: **We need no new revelation of God, but we need the old-time communion with God.** God does not reveal himself to anyone in particular, but He revealed himself to all his children. And there is nothing mysterious about that revelation of God; it is all plainly and definitely given in God's Word. We must feed upon that Word, as shown in our previous meditation. And then, we must also **follow the directions of that Word for getting in touch with God.** My friend was mistaken in thinking that God was "so far away." The trouble was, that he was far away from God. God is always there. He "will never leave nor forsake" us. But we wander away. We are chosing paths of our own and thus we get away from God. That is where the sin lies. It is our fault, not God's.

And that must be admitted and confessed. All the wishing that some Christians do that they may be nearer to God will be of no avail unless they admit that the fault of their being away from God is theirs. They are breathing impure air by having turned away from God. They allowed things to stand between their soul and the Lord, and the current of life and light from above was interrupted thereby. There is the **real trouble.**

Don't try to get your feelings worked up and your emotions stirred in order to get back into the spiritual atmosphere. Don't look for any strange, mysterious thing to happen by which you are brought back into the presence of God. No, God is speaking to you in his Word. Listen to his voice. Meditate on it. Obey it. Paul writes to Timothy: "Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them." Remember, "we have a reasonable service." And the closest fellowship with God is along the lines laid down in his own Word. Thus you become intimate with God; you breath the purified air; your Spiritual Life is in the right atmosphere; it can and will grow.

* * * * *

The directions of the Word of God, which must be followed if we would get near unto God, are especially two. The

first is, that we must "draw near to God." The Psalmist realized this when, after sinful wanderings away from God, when his "feet were almost gone" and his "steps had well nigh slipped," he said: "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps. 73: 28).

To draw near to God implies, that we must draw away from other things. In order to give our whole attention to God; to be "spiritually minded," we must make a determined effort to get away from the common, carnal things of life for a while. We must stop in the way and turn aside from the beaten track of worldly-mindedness, which is so much followed by Christians. The rush and hurry of this age of secularity, the unprofitable things of this life, have occupied us so much that we have become like children who have forgotten the voice of their Father. Now as Moses, who turned aside to see why the bush burned and was not consumed, and who then heard the voice of God and got very near to Him, so we must cultivate the habit of looking for God and of turning to Him and listening for his voice.

Get away a little, my Christian friends, whose life is so barren and spiritually impoverished—get away a little from the things which control your mind, will and affections, and let God's voice reach your soul. Let the Spirit guide you; grieve Him not by carnal mindedness or by pretended piety: "draw near unto God and He will be near unto you." Say then: I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak unto his people and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly" (Ps. 85: 8). And you will not do this and say this in vain.

Another direction of the Word of God, to be followed if we would be near unto God, is prayer. Prayer is more than asking certain favors. Prayer is communion with God; it is speaking to God who spoke to us. It is the giving of praise and thanks for all the benefits of God toward us. But especially the fact that prayer is direct communion with God makes it so important for the growth of Spiritual Life. (See Part II, Thoughts on Prayer.) The very purpose of drawing near unto God is to commune with Him in prayer. It is when we talk with God that we breath the air through which Spirit-

ual Life will grow. It also is while we pray that both the attractions of the world and the perplexities of life, which cause Spiritual Life to be weak, are removed. Nothing, in fact, is so important in the growth of Spiritual Life than to give much thought and attention to our prayers.

Let our prayers not be formal and artificial, but the utterance with the lips of faith of the inmost desires of a soul that is longing for God's presence. Let us not pray with over-strained nerves and hurried mind, but in meekness and with thoughtful heart. Truly humble prayers, prayers of faith, will have marvelous results with respect to Spiritual Life. They will flood that life with the sunshine of the presence of our God. They will drive away the mists of sin and the gloom of doubt, and will cause us to go on our way rejoicing, and singing as we go:

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God; in Him will I trust."

V

THE CULTIVATION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. Negatively

"Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life."
Prov. 4: 23

The normal growth of life depends upon proper food and air. This is true also of Spiritual Life, as we have seen in the two previous meditations. The proper food for Spiritual Life is the Word of God, and the proper air is the presence of God. It is of supreme importance to emphasize these facts.

But just as a plant in good soil and in the proper atmosphere has also need of special care in order to promote its

growth, so Spiritual Life needs special care. It must be cultivated. The weeds must be cut down, and all hindrance must be removed. And he who would have his Spiritual Life increase in stature, strength and usefulness, must "think on the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report" (Phil. 4: 6). The cultivation of Spiritual Life therefore must be both negative and positive.

The Negative Cultivation of Spiritual Life consists in combating everything that might interfere with the proper exercise of all the functions of the soul. A great many things are to Spiritual Life, what weeds and insects are to plant life. Spiritual life may be killed—not in its essence, but in its action and in the consciousness of it—by any one of a number of things, of which we shall enumerate a few of the most harmful.

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The greatest danger to Spiritual Life is lurking in so-called "little sins." Little sins sap the life of many souls. Little sins keep many Christians far away from God. Little sins keep Spiritual Life very low. And the dangerous part of them is their littleness.

Great, glaring sins are abhorred by a Christian. He knows they are terrible in their nature and in their result. He would not think of committing them. The desire to commit them already makes him feel ashamed of himself.

Not so, however, with numerous "little sins;" sins of thought, word or action, which have the general stamp of approval, and are usually not even considered as sins. These little irregularities, which are usually considered to be small flaws of character or habit, and which everybody thinks are rather harmless, these are things that make it impossible for the Spiritual Life to grow and to exert itself. They are very dangerous because they are easily overlooked.

It does not matter much just what these sins are. They are too many to enumerate. What we must remember is, that they are damaging to Spiritual Life. When one or more of these so-called little sins is cherished, the result is most disastrous.

When people speak of any sins as "little sins," they make several mistakes, of which the following are some. One mistake is that they forget that there are in reality no "little sins." Every sin is terribly great when one considers that God says: "Be ye holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." Little sins also despise the holiness and majesty of God. Little sins also disregard God's will. Another mistake that people make when speaking of "little sins" is that they forget that these little sins always lead to greater sins. The little sins themselves grow larger as the habit fastens itself upon the soul, and they also are stepping-stones to other and greater sins. Then also, people forget, that many little sins make one big mass, just as many snowflakes accumulate to such an extent that they bury trains and travelers when they roll down the mountain side. Watch the little sins, and destroy them root and branch. Don't handle them tenderly with silken gloves, but fight them rather with the mailed fist. If you don't take them, they will take you. And they certainly keep your Spiritual Life down.

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Another very harmful thing to Spiritual Life—and which must be banished—is **worldly-mindedness.** By that I do not mean so much participation in worldly affairs and sinful doing, as I mean a certain attitude of the mind, which thinks too favorable of the world, and which often follows the same line of thought that worldly people do.

It is that sort of worldly-mindedness which is found abundantly among Christians. They have no particular conscious, Christian life- and world-view. They do not realize that God's people are a "peculiar people" in every way, and that they must be distinct from the world in practically every sphere of life. They do not realize that Spiritual Life implies spiritual living in every respect; so that a Christian will think different and act different and have a different aim than the person that has not this new life within him.

There is by far too much of that kind of worldly-mindedness in our circles. Many things are done and said in our circles that have been taken over from the world, without questioning their character, simply because they look good.

We should not be narrow-minded, but more tenderness of conscience would greatly benefit Spiritual Life.

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There is a third evil which greatly harms Spiritual Life, and to which I referred before: religious formality. I do not mean to say that religious forms are not necessary, but I do mean to say, that they are not essential. Too much is often made of certain religious forms and customs. Sometimes, I fear, everything is made of them. I know of people who testified that this religious formality was so strong with them that they had often been guilty of thoughtless participation in religious exercises at home and church.

Beware of mere formality. As the Lord considered the heart of the Israelite more than He did the offering which the Israelite brought to the altar, so even now "the Lord looketh on the heart." How can Spiritual Life grow when our religious activity is but dead formality? The presence of the ark in the camp of Israel, with its subsequent capture by the Philistines, teaches us that formality is useless without the spiritual reality back of it. But let the forms be the means of giving expression of what is in the heart and they will be conducive to the growth of Spiritual Life.

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A fourth evil which is very detrimental to Spiritual Life is selfishness. There is not a more pitiable person than the one who is religiously selfish, who is thinking only of his own comfort, who does not recognize the fact that, if he is a Christian at all, he is one of many: a member of the body of Christ. Sometimes such Christians are very pious, but, after all, their piety is hypocritical. Whenever you meet a Christian who is always looking after his own comfort and interest, who only cares for what he gets out of the sermon, who is paying little or no attention to fellow-believers, you can just make up your mind that he is utterly selfish. Even his Christian piety is selfishness. That person is to be pitied, for selfishness is suicidal. Instead of promoting the growth of his own Spiritual Life, he is choking it in selfishness.

Christianity would destroy selfishness, and if any Christian fosters it, he is under the displeasure of God, and his Spiritual Life is very low.

The selfish man also sins against his fellow-believers, for while he should seek the welfare of the whole body of Christ, he is only seeking to promote the interest of one member. He thereby retards the progress of Spiritual Life in his fellow-members of Christ's body.

Let every Christian, by God's grace, root out the obnoxious, poisonous plant of selfishness, and let each individual member seek the welfare of every other member. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2: 4). The summary of a Christian's life, in respect to his fellow-believers, should be **self-sacrifice.** Then his own Spiritual Life will be promoted. Try it.

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Finally, the progress of Spiritual Life is often hindered by being too much absorbed in the **daily affairs of life.** Some Christians are building up a business at the expense of their Spiritual Life; they don't remember that business should be religion, and religion should be business. They sever the two and are consequently depriving themselves of the strength they need to reach spiritual maturity.

A man's supreme purpose in life is to glorify God, and if a Christian does not apply this divine rule to his business life, he will keep his Spiritual Life down to the stature of infancy. On the other hand, a person can be a great man in business and also attain progress in Spiritual Life, if only he has God as his partner and the Bible as his business guide.

Also, it should be remembered, that a small business is equally harmful to Spiritual Life as a big business, when the affections are set on it. In fact, we need not be engaged in any business whatsoever; we may be a common laborer, or a clerk, or it may be a Christian woman tending to the affairs of the household, or even a minister of the Gospel, pasturing his flock—if the heart and affections are unduly set on these things, they will be a hindrance to the normal growth of Spiritual Life. In regard to the daily affairs of life the

admonition of the proverb should be heeded: "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

VI

THE CULTIVATION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

2. Positively

"Set your affections on things above."
Col. 3: 2

Plants must be cultivated negatively by the removal of all that may obstruct their growth; and positively by rendering the soil more productive. Thus the growth of the plant is promoted.

The same method of cultivation must be employed with respect to the plant of Spiritual Life. The things that must be weeded out because they interfere with the growth of Spiritual Life are, as we have seen, "little sins," worldly-mindedness, religious formality, selfishness and the daily affairs of life. This is the **negative side of the cultivation** of Spiritual Life, but is far more important than most Christians seem to think. Wherever these weeds are growing Spiritual Life cannot grow.

Besides removing and combating the evils that easily prevent the growth of Spiritual Life, there are a number of things that might be done, and should be done to promote its growth. Let us consider a few of the most important of these. To properly attend to these things may be said to form the **positive side of the cultivation** of Spiritual Life. And so important is this that it cannot be emphasized too strongly. To be active in these things is to be "spiritually minded."

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To positively promote the growth of our Spiritual Life it is of foremost importance that believers remember that

"our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20 R. V.). More literally this means that the state or commonwealth that Christians belong to, and to which they are all bound by the same laws, is in heaven. They are citizens of that heavenly world. They are governed by, and should be obedient to, the laws of the heavenly commonwealth. They must remember that there are two communities of people in the world: mere earthly communities, which form political states and are governed by earthly laws, and heavenly communities, partly in heaven itself and partly still here below, which together form the great heavenly commonwealth. And the latter is far more important than the first.

To be a heavenly citizen does not make a person a bad citizen of the worldly state in which he lives. On the contrary, it makes him a better citizen of the country to which he belongs. It makes him to be more loyal, and to seek the true welfare of his country to his utmost ability.

But the heavenly commonwealth is his true and eternal home. His King is in heaven, and he looks for Him to come from heaven to assemble the scattered citizens of the heavenly commonwealth. His mind must dwell on the heavenly Jerusalem, so that his desires become more heavenly and less earthly. He must "seek the things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." He must "set his affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-4).

I read that a man who had been in Jerusalem, while talking with the great William Humboldt about what he had seen there, found out that Humboldt knew more about it than he himself, and in great surprise asked him: "How long ago were you there?" Humboldt replied: "I was never there, but I expected to go sixty years ago, and I prepared myself." That is just what every Christian should do with respect to the heavenly Jerusalem. And so much more so, because it is his "mother" (Gal. 4:26); he belongs there; it is his future home. Also, because his nearest relatives are there or are going there, for believers are "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

Our whole conduct should betray us as heaven-bred and heaven-destined. People should take notice of it, that we

are strangers here below. We must keep in constant communication with heaven. And we must daily read the correspondence that reaches us from there. Then Spiritual Life will grow, and we will be "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

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Secondly, we must seek the **"Communion of the Saints,"** the fellowship of believers. Those who are of the same household of faith that we are of must be dear to us; we must seek their company and promote their spiritual as well as physical welfare. We are of the same family. We are, with them, strangers of this world and co-heirs of heaven. We are traveling the same road. We shall stand before the same Christ in glory. We shall sing the same song of redemption. We shall together praise the Redeemer throughout eternity. We have all these things in common, and therefore we belong together. We must share each others burdens and joys. We must live as a community of strangers who seek each others company. We must love one another and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Thus we will be cultivating our own Spiritual Life, and a wonderful increase of growth will be the result. For this "communion of saints," carried on in the every-day life, will form them together as an army against all assaults of the enemy. And the Spirit of God, who dwells richly where believers live in fellowship, will manifest himelf by many tokens of his presence and grace.

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Thirdly, believers must definitely and purposely spend some time in meditation upon things spiritual. There is perhaps no greater lack in our day among believers than quiet meditation. We are in a continual rush and hurry. Even our Bible-reading and prayer is often done in a hurry. As one has said, "We are jostled out of our spirituality." We think of spiritual things in a hurry and at odd moments, or perhaps when we are sick and can't be about our daily business. We are often living out of touch with God, and this is largely due to our hurried state of mind.

Believers, take time to thing of God and spiritual things. Nothing is ever accomplished by a hurried thought. Only when we apply ourselves to the task is anything accomplished. This is also our duty with respect to spiritual things. "Think on these things," says God. And that means that meditation must be a habit. Our whole mind must be trained for it.

The whole truth of God must be the subject of our meditation. But there are certain things of special importance that demand our attention and should be meditated upon. There is **God himself.** The great, transcendent God, whom we cannot comprehend, but of whom the believer should be able to truthfully say, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet" (Ps. 104: 34). There are the wonderful **attributes of God,** revealed in nature and in the realm of grace, all speaking of his wisdom, power and holiness; his mercy, truth and justice. And there are the majestic **works of God:** the works of creation and providence, and the works of regeneration, sanctification and complete salvation. There is the wonderful **plan of God** for man's salvation. There is the blessed **Word of God;** his revelation of grace, comprising both promises and exhortations. What a limitless and pleasant field for meditation. There is the subject **of the glory that awaits us;** when we shall see Him face to face, in Christ our Lord. And that without end. These, and many more things, may be profitable and pleasant themes for meditation. And that meditation is wonderfully productive of growth in Spiritual Life. In the quiet moments of meditation the Holy Spirit will do his work and give us the increase for which every truly God-fearing soul longs.

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Finally, in order to grow we **must be active.** Try to do something for God's Kingdom and in his Church. Too many Christians seem to think that the Church is an institution merely for their benefit. They forget that it also is a training school for laborers. Do something in the Church. Take an active part in everything in which everybody is expected to take part. Take a special part wherever you can, for God has given different talents. And none is without his talent.

Do something, if it is only to be an usher, or to talk to the strangers within the gates. Do something; go about in a quiet, unobserved way, but do something. Live a helpful life and your life will be helped. If you cannot be with the soldiers at the front, you can plow and reap at home. If you cannot be a general in the Lord's army, you can be a private. If you can never shine like a great hero, you may still be useful in a quiet, obscure way; and who knows but that the reward of the King will be the same as that of those that were "considered pillars in the church."

All you have to do is to believe that you are placed where you are, and received the talents that you have, by divine appointment and then go and do what you see before you. Begin where you can; if you can't speak to a great multitude, you may be able to speak to one family or, at least, to a little child. If you can't speak to those that are well, go to those that are sick.

Do something! Find your work and do it. The exercise of doing the thing that is your appointed task will be the exercise of your own Spiritual Life, and will promote its growth. Be active and you will grow, providing you are active in unselfish devotion to the cause of God and the welfare of others.

VII

IMPORTANT MEANS TO EMPHASIZE SPIRITUAL LIFE

"According as each hath received a gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 1 Pet. 4: 10

That Spiritual Life needs to be emphasized is indisputable. Every Christian whose heart longs for God and his presence, who is "spiritually minded," will feel this need.

How is this to be done? Are there any special means to

emphasize Spiritual Life? And who are responsible in this respect? These are some of the questions which perhaps some readers have in their mind, and which I hope to answer in this meditation.

There are evidently **three special means** to emphasize Spiritual Life: the **Christian pulpit**, the **Christian press** and **personal conduct**. Great responsibility rests therefore with the **preacher**, the **writer** and the **individual Christian.**

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The **pulpit** is the place where greater emphasis must be placed upon Spiritual Life. And the preacher is the man who must do it, and upon whom therefore rests a great responsibility.

I am not now referring to preachers who deem the Bible a worn out book, and who read Tennyson in the pulpit in preference to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These blind leaders of the blind know not what Spiritual Life means; how then can they emphasize it? I refer to the pulpit which is occupied—thank God—by a man to whom the whole Word of God is "yea and amen." I refer to the thoroughly orthodox preacher. From such a pulpit, and by such a preacher, great emphasis must be placed upon Spiritual Life.

The preaching must not be orthodox merely, but it must also be heart-searching and exhortative. It must contain real food, properly prepared, and the great aim should be to cultivate such insight in the truth that it may be reasonably expected that, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, the preaching shall be conducive to growth in Spiritual Life. The pulpit must not only satisfy the intellect, but also the healthy and natural hunger of souls that long to be in the presence of God.

I think that a little less speculative reasoning, and a little less meddling with controversial topics, would greatly benefit Spiritual Life of both, the preacher and those preached to. What a man said of a religious paper can be said of many sermons, I fear: "What it contains is all true, but it lacks fragrance, or spiritual flavor." And what an earnest and appreciative church-member wrote to me some years ago as he was visiting somewhere is, alas, all too true of much preach-

ing yet: "There is something lacking in his sermons.... They are instructive, but hard to follow.... Nothing in it to arrest the attention of young people," etc. A sermon may comply with the rules for sermonizing; it may be excellent in conception, in division, in language, in logic, and yet lack the spiritual flavor which a good sermon should have. The holy fire of consecration to God that is to kindle the pews and be carried out into the lives must be started in the pulpit. And you can only start it and kindle it in the hearts of others by a warm and tender presentation of the cross of Christ.

That is what the preacher should keep in mind. And he should also keep in mind that the true spiritual fragrance in his sermons, which his people need and long for, can only come through the spiritual condition of his own heart. The preacher himself must live in the presence of God and be fully consecrated to Him, or his preaching will "lack something." Preaching without the spiritual aroma is like a rose without perfume. It may be very beautiful in texture and form and color, but "it lacks something." And this spiritual aroma is only to be obtained from Him "whose name is like sweet perfume and like ointment poured forth." The preacher must keep in touch with God or his sermons cannot be what they should be to the Spiritual Life of the people.

A great responsibility rests with the preachers therefore. No man is more severely and more unreasonably criticized than a preacher often is, but he should also so conduct himself as to "make full proof of his ministry." Let him show how general truths and doctrines should be applied to individual needs. Let him draw his inspiration for the task of preaching from the truth that he preaches, and let him bring that truth in a clear-cut, lucid, practical way. Let him not lecture to an audience, but bring a message to the people of God. And let that message call for broadening and deepening of Spiritual Life. Let it be an education unto spirituality, telling his people how they must exercise all the functions of their renewed soul to the honor of God. Let him do this earnestly, tenderly, sympathetically.

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A second important means to promote Spiritual Life is the **religious press.** In many respects the influence of books and papers is even greater than that of the pulpit. But I am not sure whether this influence is as beneficial to the Spiritual Life of the readers as it might be. It often seems to me that it is not. At any rate, a great responsibility rests upon those that contribute articles to the religious press. They should put emphasis upon the need of more Spiritual Life of the right, healthy, biblical type.

I do not mean that our writers for the religious press should all write sermonettes. Far from it. I rather think that sermons and sermonettes are not always the best reading to promote healthy Spiritual Life. What I mean is that our religious press as a whole should **aim at raising the tenor of Spiritual Life.** It should emphasize the fact that the Christian, being by regeneration a new creature, a spiritual man, should allow this new life to dominate all his thoughts, desires and actions. It should aim to give the readers a better, a more biblical idea of what Spiritual Life actually is. It should make clear that Spiritual Life is not something all by itself and apart from man's every-day vocation in life, but that it has to control a Christian's actions, attitude and aims in everything. The religious press, as well as the Christian pulpit, should warn people against the folly and sin of separating their religion from their daily life. It should emphasize the fact that **"whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do it all to the glory of God."** That is true spirituality. Everything else that is looked upon as spirituality is but an imitation of it. The aim of the religious press should be to emphasize Spiritual Life by echoing forth the admonition of Scripture, that "the man of God must be perfect, **thoroughly furnished unto all good works,"** and by showing how the man of God—the true Christian—may become such. I see no reason at all why there should be a religious press if it is not for that purpose. And I am sure that nothing would more promote the growth of Spiritual Life than if the press should follow that purpose.

Alas, it is a painful fact that the religious press, that our own religious papers, are far from following that purpose as they might. A great deal of what is dished up week after

week in religious papers is neither palatable to healthy taste, nor instructive to the mind, nor likely to effect the will. I have often asked after reading an article, "Now, what is the writer's object?" It seems to me that some writers have no definite object at all. Why they write is a riddle to me. Others perhaps have an object, but it is hard to tell just what it is. Others have an object in writing, but it is neither of interest or value to the reading public. Some are even guilty of smart trickery in the interpretation of Scripture. Not a few are theorizing much but with little Scriptural basis. On the whole, the religious press has been below what might reasonably be expected of it as a means of sound and practical interpretation and reflection of what God would have his people know and do. And its influence for the promotion of Spiritual Life has been comparatively small. Perhaps better days are coming in this respect. Let us hope it.

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Not the least important means to promote Spiritual Life is the **personal conduct** of each Christian, and especially of such Christians who occupy prominent places. Scripture tells us: "None of us liveth to himself." That is true in every way. It is inevitably true. And it places upon each individual Christian a great responsibility. We have a tremendous weapon in our own personality, and by our conduct we are using it for good or bad. And every Christian must endeavor to use it for good. "Edify one another," is the admonition. "Let us therefore follow after the things wherewith one may edify another." "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification."

Now, **edification** means to build up. And the **building up** here refers to the new life and its activities. We must, each one of us, use our influence for the building up of the Spiritual Life of others. We all feel the chill of mere formality and outward orthodoxy; let us then by word and action bring some life into the lifeless forms, and some warmth into the cold orthodoxy. Let us speak freely and tenderly of the graciousness of our God and Savior, and let us exhort one another to that humble devotion to God and his cause, which is the flower of Spiritual Life. Let each Christian seek com-

munion with God, and let a spiritually fragrant life be the fruit of this communion, and the means of edifying one another. And as our position in the home, church and community is more responsible than perhaps the position of others, let also our spiritual influence be correspondingly greater. Others are looking at us. Our life will, humanly speaking, determine what their life shall be. Let us not forget to make our life by God's grace a sweet savor unto God, and a beam of light to others. "According as each hath received a gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

VIII

THE FRUIT OF SPIRITUALLY MINDEDNESS

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."
Gal. 5: 22, 23

"To write the same things unto you, to me indeed is not irksome, but to you it is safe." Thus said Paul to the Philippians. It sometimes is well to repeat things, and I think it will be conducive to the spiritual life of the thoughtful reader if we briefly repeat what we have so far considered.

1. We saw first that Spiritual Life, in the true sense, is the capability to exercise the functions of the soul in the proper way; that is, in the way in which God ordained these functions to be exercised. In this connection we further noticed two things, which must be kept in mind in order to have any clear and true conception of Spiritual Life:

(a) That man has lost this capability through sin, and that a distinct and specific creation of the Holy Spirit is necessary to restore this capability. Without this work of the Spirit man remains spiritually dead. Through this work of the Spirit man becomes "a new creature," endued anew with Spiritual Life functions.

(b) That, though every true Christian has received this renewed life, it is absolutely necessary, if we would understand the teaching of Scripture on this point, to distinguish between the **possession of spiritual life** and the **living of spiritual life.** To live spiritually means that we exercise these renewed functions and thus bring the new life to definite **realization.** These are things that must be clearly understood and constantly kept in mind.

2. Our second point for consideration was that we must **guard against one-sidedness with respect to Spiritual Life.** Facts have often proved that through a one-sided emphasis upon the need of Spiritual Life, people have gone to sad and harmful extremes. Some have emphasized the **intellectual,** others the **experimental,** still others the so-called **practical side** of Spiritual Life. If either one of the functions of our soul is emphasized at the expense of the other functions, our Spiritual Life becomes one-sided, and not seldom this one-sidedness leads men to **substituting** a sham spirituality for the real thing. To live spiritually means that we **exercise all the functions of the soul,** both outwardly and inwardly, toward the living God and in fellowship with Him.

3. We have, thirdly, considered the **normal growth of Spiritual Life.** We saw that God has destined Spiritual Life to grow; that it must increase and expand. And we noticed that in order to grow it must have **proper food** and **proper air.**

(a) The proper food is **the inspired Word of God.** We must eat and drink it. We must assimilate it. And this must be done by the personal effort of studying the Word of God thoughtfully, systematically, reverently, believingly and prayerfully. And it must be done by proper attention to the true, biblical ministration of the Word of God in the preaching.

(b) The proper atmosphere or air is **the presence of God.** We must seek to commune with God, to have fellowship with Him. And this implies that we draw away from things that keep us at a distance from God and that we practice the holy art of prayer. We must get out of the bad air and into the heavenly atmosphere.

4. In the fourth place the **cultivation of Spiritual Life** was considered. Spiritual Life is often spoken of as a **plant.** And as all plant life, so Spiritual Life must be properly cultivated. This must be done in two ways, as we have seen:

(a) By **removing that which retards and harms the growth** of Spiritual Life, which includes primarily that we fight against so-called "little sins," worldly-mindedness, religious formality, spiritual selfishness and being absorbed in the daily affairs of life.

(b) We must **cultivate the plant** of Spiritual Life within us by remembering that "our citizenship is in heaven," by seeking "the communion of saints," by "thinking upon these things" of God and by being active in the affairs of the Church of God.

5. Fifthly we have considered some of the **means to emphasize Spiritual Life** and have noticed that there are especially three means by which this may be done. The first is **the Christian pulpit**—and this lays a heavy responsibility upon everyone that ever stands in it. The man in the pulpit must give to young and old "their meat in due season" and must "make full proof of his ministry." If he does not do this, God will have no reward for him. I fear many preachers will be disappointed because of their failure on this point.

The second means to promote Spiritual Life is the **Christian press,** which must have this one great aim: to labor "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

And the third important means to promote Spiritual Life is the **personal conduct** of the individual Christian. This is perhaps the most important of all.

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I now wish to add to the forgoeing a few words concerning the **fruit of spiritually mindedness.** This also is very important to consider. Does not Scripture teach us that "by their fruits ye shall know them?" Fruitbearing is the test for the quality of the tree. You can depend upon that every time. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit," said our

Lord, And still stronger: "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit" (Matt. 7: 16-20).

Fruitbearing is, therefore, the test of our Spiritual Life. It shows what our Spiritual Life really is. It shows the stature of our Spiritual Life. And consequently it brings the consciousness of the reality of our Spiritual Life to our own soul. We can know ourselves from the fruit we bear.

This is the thing that we must constantly keep in mind. Many people are judging others by their fruit. And often times they judge others by the fruits which they think others ought to bear. They can tell precisely what others should be, and they can figure out accurately just how far others are below the mark. Better it would be if we would test ourself, each individually, by the fruit that we bear.

Scripture defines and enumerates these fruits in many places. Perhaps the most complete catalogue of them is found in Galatians 5: 22-24. There they are spoken of as "fruit of the Spirit," indicating that they are the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, by which we are enabled to bear these fruits. Without the renewal of the heart and the constant guidance of the Spirit of God there can be no other fruits but those mentioned in Gal. 5: 19-21 as "works of the flesh." The natural man "minds the things of the flesh;" his mind is occupied by such things, and therefore his life brings forth those things.

The nine fruits of spiritually mindedness mentioned in the above named verses, and other fruits which are mentioned in other parts of Scripture, can be summed up in the two of Rom. 8: 6, where we read: "To be spiritually minded is life and peace." We shall see, with the help of God, just what this means in two subsequent meditations. For the present let me call your attention to the wording of this verse of Scripture.

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Notice that the fruit of Spiritual Life, summed up in the two words, life and peace, is said to result from being "spiritually minded." Or stronger still, to be spiritually minded is said to be identical with life and peace. Just as those who have in mind the carnal things are said to be "carnally

minded," which is identical with death itself, so those that have in mind the things of the Spirit are "spiritually minded," which is identical with life and peace.

Let this be clearly understood, for it is of utmost importance. To be carnally minded means that one's mind is occupied by carnal things, that such a mind is guided by corrupt sinful desires and aspirations, that the soul delights in sin and seeks the gratification of its corrupt nature. And to be carnally minded does not merely result in death as a punishment, but it is death itself; the very inclination and desire for sin is death, for sin is death always. It is only possible to be thus carnally minded when death is present and when a man is "dead in trespasses and sin."

To be spiritually minded means that the mind is occupied with the things of the Holy Spirit; that is, such things as the Holy Spirit produces and for which He gives desires. The mind of a true child of God begins to be occupied with such things; they become his desire and the very object of his life. And as these things are of the Spirit, and in harmony with the Spirit, they are life itself, for through the life-giving act of the Holy Spirit these desires came in the soul and began to occupy the mind.

So the question, whether or not we are spiritually minded, is answered by the true reply to another question: whether we mind the things of the Spirit. Do we ask for God's will as revealed by the Spirit in the Word of God? Do we desire to live according to that most holy will of God? Have we "set our affections (mind R. V.) on the things that are above and not on the things that are upon the earth?" Are we aiming to be in the path that the Spirit of God wants us to travel day by day? O, the question is not whether we are perfect in this "new obedience," for no one ever was or ever shall be here below. The question is whether we are minded to do God's will, to be "holy even as He is holy," to live for heaven and in heavenly things, to hate all sin.

IX

THE FRUIT OF SPIRITUALLY MINDEDNESS

1. It Is Life

"To be spiritually minded is life," says Rom. 8: 6.

That includes much more than mere existence. Just as death is spoken of in this verse and in the context in its widest range, so life is referred to in the widest range. To be spiritually minded is life in a sense, which includes all the activities and all the happiness and joy that make up life itself.

Many of God's children have a very limited conception of Spiritual Life. To them it is merely the existence of this life, as wrought by the Holy Spirit in regeneration, and which insures to them eternal life hereafter. To be sure, they also admit that this new life calls for separation from the world, but that is about as far as they ever get with respect to living out their spiritual life. They have apparently no conception of the great and all-important fact that there must be an actual realization of this Spiritual Life through their own effort; that they must not only be possessors of Spiritual Life, but must live spiritually.

As said before, this limited conception of Spiritual Life has become one of the great causes of spiritual decline, and spiritual barrenness and darkness. If once God's children would realize that the gift of Spiritual Life by the Holy Spirit includes power given to them to exercise the renewed functions of their soul, and thus to live spiritually, what a great and glorious change would come in the life of many of them, and throughout the whole household of faith. That would mean a real revival in the church.

Perhaps more than ever it is necessary, that these things are emphasized from the pulpit. I think the two chapters of the Bible that need to be fully and emphatically explained from the pulpit more than any other chapter are Rom. 8 and Gal. 5 from the fifteenth verse to the end. And no verse of Scripture should ring out from the pulpit and should be

prayerfully considered by God's people so much in these days as Gal. 5: 25, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." I think our ministers should cultivate with all their power a better conception, a fuller comprehension of everything that pertains to Spiritual Life in the true, healthy, biblical sense. Unless this is done, and done speedily. I fear that many more of God's true children in our church-fold will drift away into other churches, less sound in doctrine, perhaps, but where they find a stimulating, invigorating spiritual atmosphere.

I very well know that by saying this I lay myself liable to the charge of being too much of a sentimentalist, and, perhaps, not free from "mysticism." Let me say, however, that I am not saying these things unadvisedly, nor merely critically. I have thought and prayed much over these things, for I have seen a sad lack of them in our church life and in the preaching. A sad lack; for while our people on the whole are, perhaps, still doctrinally sound, many of them are **spiritually unsound.** To be doctrinally sound may mean, as one has said, "truth on ice." Logically correct and doctrinally true, yes, but as to the practical needs of life, and as to the inward longings of many souls, cold as a block of ice. God grant that we may be delivered from that sort of preaching and thinking, for it works great havoc among us, as it necessarily must do wherever it is found.

And then, notwithstanding its apparent logical correctness and doctrinal soundness, I would ask: is this sort of thing—this mere matter-of-fact way of preaching and thinking—is it as logically correct and doctrinally sound as it seems to be and often boasts of being? I think not! I rather fear that its soundness is much like the soundness of fruit, which seems perfectly sound on the outside, but which is rotten within. I find in my Bible that not only was the life of the early Christians a life full of glow and warmth, because their soul was filled with the Spirit and they were spiritually minded, but also the preaching of the apostles and evangelists, being modelled after the preaching of the Lord Christ, was full of glow and warmth. We do not find "truth on ice" with the early believers and preachers, but rather

what might be called "truth on fire." And God grant that we may get back to that. We hear much in these days about "modern interpretation of Scripture," and "modern scholarship" and "advanced thinking," etc. And while I am far from saying that a thing or an idea is wrong because it is modern, or good because it is ancient, I am firmly convinced that much of what is lauded as "modern" and "advanced" has led many more away from the truth than to it, and, to say the least, it has caused much spiritual barrenness and cold orthodoxy.

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"To be spiritually minded is life."

We want **life**, of course. We want life for ourselves, personally; and we want life in our churches. True, full, well-rounded life, is what we desire.

We want **action.** Surely we do, for life is action. We want people to take a lively interest in the affairs of the local church and in the Church and the Kingdom at large.

We want people to **know** that they have life, that they have passed from death unto life, that the Holy Spirit dwells in them and abides with them, that they are God's children.

We want **fellowship** with God, communion with the Most High. We want to eat of the heavenly manna that is hidden with God in Christ; we want to drink of the water of life freely.

We want life "more abundantly;" we want to see spiritual life grow and to attain to the stature of maturity, and not to see it remain small and weak, like the life of a babe in Christ.

We want to see this life grow continually, according to the promise of Psalm 84: 7, "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

How are we to get all this, and more? How?!

Not by making a special effort now and then to act particularly pious.

Not by getting wound up occasionally so that we assume great spirituality.

Not by praying much at times when we think we feel specially led by the Spirit.

These things may appear spiritual and may look very desirable, but they are like the occasional flare of the dying embers. They have no abiding results. All sporadic efforts to become more spiritual are doomed to failure.

What is needed is to be "spiritually minded."

The whole renewed mind must be tuned to spirituality, so that piety and prayer are no longer produced by special effort but become a habit, a holy habit.

We must train ourselves step by step, degree after degree, to think, speak and act as true children of God, so that it becomes as natural for us to do this as it is natural for the flower to turn to the sunlight.

Let us get away from all artificiality and superficiality with respect to spiritual life and remember that it is the fruit of a constant, abiding, deep, humble, consecrated spiritually mindedness. In no other way will we attain to a higher plane of spiritual life.

And to become spiritually minded requires effort. Just as it requires a certain degree of effort to engage our mind in any other subject. Also here the truth of the apostle's saying must be kept in mind, "We have a reasonable service."

Read again what is briefly repeated in the previous meditations about the normal growth, the cultivation and the means to emphasize Spiritual Life.

Especially prayer must be resorted to for the growth and proper activity of our Spiritual Life. "Seek and ye shall find" is the injunction. If we lack courage and strength, we must ask of Him "who giveth liberally and upbradeth not." God's promises are unlimited with respect to all things that we need for the increase of faith, hope and love and for genuine spiritually mindedness.

"Go to the deeps of God's promise;
Ask freely of Him, and receive;
All good may be had for the asking,
If, seeking, ye truly believe.

"Go to the deeps of God's promise;
The blessing is never denied;
He loves and remembers his children,
And every good thing is supplied.

"Go to the deeps of God's promise;
There's wideness of meaning untold
In the promises given his people,
And the treasures they ever unfold."

X

THE FRUIT OF SPIRITUALLY MINDEDNESS

2. It Is Peace

When Paul states that, "**to be spiritually minded is peace**" the word "peace" is used to denote a subjective spiritual quality. It is used in the same sense in Rom. 2: 10, where it is stated, that "peace (is) to every man that worketh good." It does not, therefore, signify peace as contrasted with strife, but it denotes peace as a state of untroubled and undisturbed wellbeing.

Such a state of peace will also lead to peace as contrasted with strife, for they that have peace will promote peace. But they may be in this state of peace even when they are much troubled outwardly, just as the waters in the deep places of the ocean remain peaceful and quiet when the waters on the surface are greatly disturbed by the storms.

In the same sense the word "peace" is used in Acts 9: 31, where it is said that "the churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace." This does not mean primarily that there was no persecution raging against them, but it refers to their state of spiritual wellbeing.

How little of this peace is found in these days among confessing Christians, alas! The inward restlessness of many souls is quite evident from their outward disturbed life. How few Christians there are whose outward conversation and walk evidences that they have this peace. How many, on the other hand, reveal that this peace, which is said

to be the inevitable fruit of spiritually mindedness, is sadly lacking. Consequently, we see, by the very life many Christian people, the great need of emphasizing the admonition of the Word of God, to be "spiritually minded," to "set the affections on things above" and "to think on them."

O, these things sound so simple, so common; they are so well known as being true that the very simplicity of them, the very fact that they are known to be true, seems to induce many Christians to carelessness concerning them. While writing about this subject of Spiritual Life, and the need to emphasize it, I have felt all the time that I am writing on, perhaps, the best known, but also the most neglected subject. People admit that spiritually mindedness is lacking, that it is necessary in order to preserve our Spiritual Life in a healthy state and to live spiritually; they often express a desire for more of that calm repose which enables the renewed man to ride at anchor amid the storms of life, but, alas! that is as far as it goes. There is no seeking of this peace through real spiritually mindedness with most of them that admit its lack and know its necessity and desire to possess it. They continue to go on to seek the things that are on earth, to be so occupied by the affairs of this life that they find it rather convenient to dispose of the things of the life to come until they get sick and perhaps must die.

Christian friends, who have not this peace abounding in your soul, do you not know that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come?" Therefore, "exercise thyself rather to godliness," which essentially is nothing else than spiritually mindedness. And instead of being disturbed outwardly and inwardly, tossed about on the sea of uncertainty, and, perhaps, of doubt, you will experience the blessed truth that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

We are living in times which, by reason of all the turmoil and restlessness, call God's children more than ever to spiritually mindedness. These are days when men cry, "Peace, peace, while there is no peace." Whatever our view of the present world condition may be, there can be no question in

the minds of God's true children that these are "perilous times," as the Bible speaks of them. And the greatest peril to the believers is that they lose their spiritual bearing. I fear that that has happened to a great many Christians. They are following in the world's procession, thinking more of the peace powers than of the Peace Prince, listening more to the modern ideas concerning culture than to the Bible-teaching concerning Christ. Ah! remember, "to be spiritually minded is peace."

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As stated at the beginning, the peace here referred to denotes a subjective spiritual quality which may be called undisturbed wellbeing. It consists primarily in being at peace with God. Not merely objectively and in a judicial sense, but being at peace with God subjectively and in a moral sense. It is that inward assurance which results in calm repose and the joy that there is no condemnation for us, because we are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8: 1). Come what may the soul of those that have this peace as fruit of spiritually mindedness is undismayed and undisturbed. It matters not what trials come and what billows of woe threaten to roll over him, such a soul knows that the main question of his life is settled forever. Therefore he also knows "that all things work together for good to him who loves God." Happiness guaranteed to him for eternity secures him happiness here. He "rejoices in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him."

All this—let it never be forgotten—is the fruit of spiritually mindedness. Without this spiritually mindedness we will remain strangers to this peace, but as we become more spiritually minded, having our affections set on the things above and aiming to serve the Lord while we are here below, this undisturbed peace will become ours, and it will constantly increase. The Lord "giveth more grace" is the assurance. He therefore will also increase this grace of peace, according to the measure of great goodness. As the prophet Isaiah says: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect grace (literally

"peace, peace;" that is, double peace), whose mind is stayed on thee" (26: 3). Read that right. It says: "whose mind is stayed on thee." It means the same as to be "spiritually minded."

They that possess this peace, this undisturbed wellbeing, will naturally also be lovers of peace and haters of strife. This subjective quality of their soul will also make itself seen and heard in life. This peace is an active peace. It will "make for peace." It will promote peace. It is not quarrelsome, but it seeks to share its own quietude with others. With "joy" and "peace" are mentioned in Gal. 5: 22-24 as fruits of spiritually mindedness the qualities of "love, longsuffering, gentleness and goodness." These qualities go a long way in making for peace among men, and especially peace among brethren and fellow-believers.

What if this active side of peace, as it reveals itself in relation to others, is lacking? There is only one answer to that question: Then the inward, subjective spiritual quality, which is primarily denoted by the word "peace," is lacking, and consequently there is a lack of spiritually mindedness. Now, if there is one thing among Christians today which proves the lack of spiritually mindedness and which shows therefore the need of greater emphasis on Spiritual Life, it is the critical, quarrelsome, fault-finding attitude of one Christian toward another. And I doubt whether there is any group of Christians where that attitude is stronger at present than it is among our Christian Reformed people. My heart aches as I write about this thing, for it is a sad, a lamentable fact, and there seems to be little feeling of guilt among us on account of it. May there be a conversion on that point among us on a large scale, for it is certainly needed.

If we become, individually and as a Church, more spiritually minded, there will be a great change in our attitude toward one another. We will then learn to "look not every man on his own things," have his own aims and ideas which each tries to enforce upon the other, but each will also look on the things that are of other believers. And we will then be "like minded, having the same love, being of one accord,

of one mind." Then nothing will be done "through strife on vain glory, but in lowliness of mind each will esteem the other better than themselves" (Phil. 2: 2-4). Let us not mistake faultfinding for principle. One of the great principles of the Christian faith is peacableness. And it grows on that branch of the plant of faith which is called "spiritually mindedness." Let us, by God's grace, bear that fruit more abundantly.

Let our constant prayer be: Lord, give us this life and give it more abundantly, for thy name's sake.

PART II

THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

"Be ye therefore Sober and Watch unto Prayer."
1 Pet. 4: 7

"I love the Lord, who heard my cry
And granted my request;
In Him who hears and answers prayer
My trust through life shall rest."
Ps. 116

XI

"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY"

> "And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of his disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, etc."
>
> Luke 11: 1-4

The question whether prayer is necessary and effectual finds no place among earnest, biblical Christians. You might as well ask whether it is necessary for a person to breath in order to live. Prayer has rightly been called the breathing of the soul. Our soul life depends upon whether, and to what extent, we pray.

The subject of prayer is an inexhaustible one. One might write or meditate on it for weeks and still find that he has but scarcely begun.

I wish to express only a few practical thoughts on this subject of prayer in this and in the following meditations. I do not pretend to make a systematic study of the subject. It seems to me that there is little need of a systematic study of the subject of prayer; what we do need is a better conception of what is meant by a "life of prayer."

Sometimes it seems to me that Christians are not leading a "life of prayer" very much these days. I think that Christians, generally speaking, are not very efficient in this holy art. There seems to be a good deal of artificiality, as well as superficiality, among Christians in regard to prayer. Surely, it is worth while to turn our mind to this subject and reverently to meditate on it. If our Spiritual Life is to grow strong and vigorous, we must breath the air of heaven, as we have seen; we must "draw near to God" in prayer.

The disciples also felt the great necessity of prayer. And especially after they heard the Lord pray at a certain place, and noticed how He poured out his very soul before the Father, they were convinced of the imperfection of their life of prayer and anxious to be instructed.

The Lord, in his answer to their request, does not speak to them of the necessity of prayer, but, assuming that prayer was a daily habit with them, He says, "When ye pray, say," etc. The Lord gives them instruction in the holy art of prayer, and this instruction is for our learning also.

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There are two important characteristics about prayer which we should constantly keep in mind if we are going to pray to any degree "as we ought."

Firstly, **prayer is a very simple action.** It is the simplest form and the easiest form of worship. It requires no great knowledge nor special gifts of rhetorical expression. Learned people are not necessarily far advanced in the art of prayer. Nor are the aged greater in prayer than the young. Even children can pray; and they often do pray more according to the will of God than Christians who are advanced in years.

Secondly, **prayer is fellowship of the soul with God.** Prayer does not at all depend upon words, but upon the attitude of the soul. In Matt. 6, where the Lord gives the same prayer in substance that we find in Luke 11, He expressly warns against "much speaking" and "vain repetitions." The true beginning of a prayer or, better still, the beginning of a true prayer is the **yearning of the soul toward God.** It can therefore never be fully expressed or explained how God's children make their prayers. Perhaps it was never more beautiful and more correctly expressed what constitutes prayer than by James Montgomery, who said:

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Unuttered or expressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

"Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high."

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But these very characteristics of prayer—**simplicity** in form and **fellowship** of the soul with God—make it **difficult for us to pray as we ought.**

If prayer consisted mainly in using fine phrases and making solemn declarations, we might find it much easier to pray.

Or if prayer were only speaking to God, and not in the first place **communion** with God, we would, perhaps, be further advanced in this spiritual exercise.

For is it not one of the most difficult things for us to do, to put aside all desire to make a show of words? And is it not also one of the most difficult things for us to do, to actually draw our soul and ourself away from mere outward forms and to commune with God?

Every Christian who seriously attempts to do these things will find them well-nigh beyond his reach.

This is exactly what the disciples felt when they heard Jesus pray. They were filled with awe, for it seemed to them that they had never yet prayed so that it might be called a prayer. They felt ashamed of their poor attempts at prayer; they realized that they had to start all over again and that they must yet **learn to pray.** They had undoubtedly considered prayer somewhat as the rabbies did. They had been more concerned about the words and phrases than about the real contents and the right attitude of their soul in prayer.

Realizing this, they wait in deep reverence until Jesus rises from his prayer and then forthwith they come to Him with the urgent request, "Lord, teach us to pray." Answering their request, the Lord gives them a simple **model of a**

true prayer, so far as words and contents is concerned. And thus the Lord would teach them both simplicity in form and the fellowship of their soul with God.

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We must not make wrong use of this prayer. While it is permissible to use the Lord's Prayer literally, it certainly is not necessary to do so. The Lord did not intend it to be a fixed formula. He himself does not use the same words in Matt. 6 and in Luke 11, and we never read of the apostles using this prayer literally, while often other prayers are mentioned.

By using this prayer verbally we would almost inevitably fall into the habit of thoughtlessly repeating the words, and thus it would become a "vain repetition."

When Jesus says, "After this manner pray ye," He does not command a verbal use of this prayer, but He very plainly intended it to be a model, after which our prayer should be molded. He does not forbid, but rather urges us to pray in other words than those used in this model.

As a model, it is not a long, but a great prayer. It includes all that a prayer should include. It leaves nothing out, but mentions all things in the briefest possible way.

It is a model in directness. It teaches us to address God directly and in simple words of childlike faith.

It is a model in humbleness. There is nothing boastful about this prayer. Humility is desired by God as we approach Him in prayer.

It is a model in the order of things asked for. The first three petitions have reference to God: to his Name, his Kingdom and his Will. The second three petitions make our human needs known to the Lord, and the right proportion of the respective needs of body and soul is also indicated. Thus the Lord teaches us how to pray, showing plainly that God's honor must be considered above all else.

It is also important to notice that the Lord gives further instructions about the right attitude of our soul toward God while we pray, especially that our heart must be free from doubt when we pray (Luke 11: 5-13). This is one of the first

requisites. We must believe that "heaven finds an ear when sinners find a tongue," that God will hear and answer prayer. Our greatest concern should not be whether God answers prayer, but how we pray. The Lord delights to answer prayer, and our prayer always falls below God's resources. The great question is whether we pray, truly pray.

"O thou, by whom we come to God—
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer thyself hast trod;
Lord! teach us how to pray."

XII

WHEN PRAYER SEEMS TO BE UNHEARD

"But He answered her not a word."
Matt. 15: 23

"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?"

Thus the prophet Isaiah, when he comforts the people with the sure promises of Jehovah, exhorts them to believe that the Lord will hear their prayers.

Yet, it often seems, that the Lord takes no notice of the appeals that rise up to heaven, and many there are who have been sorely perplexed and in soul agony have asked, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

Let us prayerfully consider this perplexing subject, "When prayer seems to be unheard." I trust it will lead us to more earnest and believing prayer.

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In the verse of the present meditation we read that Jesus did not answer a poor woman who cried out to Him: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." The Lord did not even take

the trouble, so it seemed, to "send her away," as the disciples thought He ought to do (vs. 23b). He answered her not a word. He seemed to take no notice of her whatever. He just let her cry, cry, cry; for we read that the disciples said: "She crieth after us." She followed Him up through the road, and yet the Lord gave no answer.

This is the more surprising when we consider how this woman prayed, and what she prayed about.

Her whole prayer is a sample of **humility.**

She is conscious of her **unworthiness** and admits it, for she does not ask for **help,** but she cries for **mercy.**

She **recognizes** Jezus to be the son of David, the Savior, and calls Him **Lord.** It is a true confession of Christ, therefore.

She **does not doubt** Christ's power to help her, nor his willingness. It is therefore the **prayer of faith.**

And she prays about a matter that very urgently calls for divine intervention: her daughter is in the power of the devil. What greater reason for prayer could there be? And how proper that she comes to Him who came into the world to destroy the works of the devil.

And yet it seems that the hearer of prayer is deaf, for He answers her not one word. There never was a more urgent and humble prayer, nor a case that was more needy, and her faith was so great that Jesus himself said a little while later, "O woman, great is thy faith." But the Lord, for the moment that she cries out her agonizing prayer, seems not to hear, or to be unwilling to answer.

* * * * *

We need not inquire about the particular reason why the Lord did not answer this woman. Some who read these words have had perhaps the same experience. Yea, it may be that some one is even now crying to the Lord for mercy for himself or in behalf of a dear one, and the Lord remains silent.

And perhaps you have asked yourself whether you did not pray in faith, or whether your sins were such that the Lord refuses to listen to you.

And it surely is well for each of us to search our heart with respect to our prayers. We can never be too severe with ourselves in that respect.

But we must also remember, as we see from this incident, that the Lord sometimes lets his children wait. At times God answers immediately, and thus strengthens the faith of his children. But there are times when the Lord does not seem to pay any attention to our prayers, and then we must remember that **the silence of the Lord is also an answer.**

That silence of the Lord may be grievous to your soul, it may be a painful trial of your faith, it may cut deep into your heart and cause your eyes to run over with tears; but it is no sign of indifference of your Lord.

When you cry to God for pardon, and the Lord answers you not a word, it may be that He is thereby giving you a deeper sense of sin, so that also your joy, when God does answer you—as He certainly will—may be the greater.

When you cry to God for the conversion of some one near and dear to your heart, and the Lord answers you not a word, it may be that He is leading that soul for which you pray through such inward experiences that his grace will shine out more luminous when the day comes that He openly answers your prayer.

When God's hand is resting heavy upon you through many trials and numerous troubles, and He answers you not a word, then fall at his feet and trust his mercy, for "His mercy endureth forever."

Christ will not remain silent always, and the longer his silence may seem, the more gracious will his answer be to them that believe.

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"Unanswered yet? The prayer your lips have pleaded,
In agony of heart these many years?
Does faith begin to fail: is hope departing,
And think you all in vain those falling tears?
Say not, the Father hath not heard your prayer:
You shall have your desire sometime, somewhere.

"Unanswered yet? Though when you first presented
This petition at the Father's throne,
It seemed you could not wait the time of asking,
So urgent was your heart to make it known. —
Though years have passed since then, do not despair;
The Lord will answer you sometime, somewhere.

"Unanswered yet? Faith cannot be unanswered.
Her feet were firmly planted on the Rock;
Amid the wildest storm she stands undaunted,
Nor quails before the loudest thunder-shock.
Faith knows Omnipotence has heard her prayer,
And cries, 'It shall be done,' sometime, somewhere."

XIII

IMPORTUNATE PRAYER

"And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Matt. 15: 27

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Luke 18: 1

This woman became bolder when the Lord did not answer her a word.

She said, as it were, with Jacob: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." She kept on crying for mercy, just like the widow of the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18: 1-8).

And when finally the Lord spoke to her, and his words seemed to be even more disheartening than his silence had been; when the Lord seemed to reject her plea irrevocably by saying, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs," then this woman came forward in all the boldness of a steadfast faith. She would not be rejected. She believed that the Lord could not reject her. So she kept asking and praying when everything, and even the Lord himself, seemed to discourage her.

Here we have then a life example of what the Lord had been previously teaching his followers in the parable of the importunate friend (Luke 11: 5-10), an example that the disciples and the believers of this day greatly need. We are inclined to give up so soon as we meet with seemingly discouraging signs. Instead of exerting the strength of faith on the matter that we pray about we are soon ready to yield to the inclination of doubt that is within us. Believers faint in their prayer instead of "tightening the grip" on the Lord when He does not answer immediately.

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What is the reason that many of the Lord's children are not importunate in their prayer? Why do they faint?

It is often thought, and sometimes said, that it is because they feel their utter unworthiness so much that they dare not believe to be answered.

But I think that idea is false. If that were the case, how then would they dare to pray at all? The fact is that people are not afraid at all to pray to the Lord about a certain matter, and yet they faint almost immediately when their prayer finds no ready response.

When we think little of ourselves, we will the more feel our need of God and that will lead us to importunate prayer. The more we realize that our help is with the Lord alone and that we are utterly unworthly of God's mercy to hear us the more urgent will our prayer become.

Look at this woman. She did not object to it to be compared with the dogs. She thought so little of herself that she considered it quite natural to be compared to dogs. She did not feel hurt at all, as many others would have; but she fully agreed with the Lord as He thus addressed her while she was lying at his feet worshipping Him.

The reason why we often faint in our prayer is not because we think so little of ourselves, but because we don't think enough of the Lord. When our prayer ceases, it is not because we mistrust ourselves so much, but because we distrust the Lord. Our sins are not in our way, but our lack of faith is in the way.

Let us not deceive ourselves on this point. Very often people will talk as if they dared not pray any more because of their feeling of unworthiness. But that is not so, even though they may think it so. It is lack of faith. Nothing else. We distrust God. If we had more confidence in Him, we would pray more as we saw more of our unworthiness.

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This woman thought much of Christ. She thought that at his table of mercy there was enough so that she, unworthy as she was, could have a few crumbs. And she believed that Christ was generous enough not to refuse her these crumbs. She believed that just a crumb would be enough to cast the devil out of her daughter; so much she thought of the power of this mercy.

A great thing it was that she wanted of Christ, and yet it seemed to her but like a crumb of the great abundance of the mercy of Christ Jesus. And she wanted that crumb, and was satisfied with nothing less.

And she **won out by believing,** and keeping on believing. Far from being disheartened by the seemingly harsh words of Christ, she drew an argument from them in her own favor, and she says, as it were: "Now, Lord, thou must surely help me, for no master refuses to the dogs the crumbs that fall from the table." **And even the Lord could not deny the logic of that argument.** He granted her the request that she had been making so persistently.

Notice, however, that the Lord plainly says, that it is her **faith that gained this victory.** The Lord addresses her thus: "O woman, **great is thy faith;** be it unto thee even as thou wilt." It is only faith that continues the struggle and keeps praying when not answered. And faith will not be put to shame. Faith thinks little of self, but it thinks much of Christ. Therefore it cannot be put to shame, for the shame would be on Christ if the prayer of faith, the importunate prayer, was not answered.

Notice also that it is **no loss but gain to the soul when the answer to prayer is delayed,** so that it becomes necessary to be importunate in prayer. Faith profits by God's apparent indisposition to answer prayer. It will cling firmer to God

when it appears as if God would withdraw. And thus faith grows strong. That is one of God's great purposes in delaying the answer.

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Surely, believers "ought always to pray and not to faint." We are honoring God when we faint not in prayer. We then recognize truly our unworthiness, and we thereby confess the truthfulness of God. For He has promised to listen. Read again Luke 18: 1-8. God may delay the answer, but He does not dismiss the believer and his prayer. Base your petitions upon his word of promise. Say, as you go on praying and believing:

"Upon thy Word I rest;
So strong, so sure,
So full of comfort blest,
So sweet, so pure:
The charter of salvation:
Faith's broad foundation.

"Upon thy Word I stand:
That cannot die.
Christ seals it in my hand.
He cannot lie.
Thy Word that faileth never:
Abiding ever."

XIV

PRAYER OUT OF SEASON

> "And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." Ex. 14: 15

A hasty and thoughtless reading of this Scripture verse might give one the impression that God does not care much for prayer. He seems to discourage prayer when He says

to Moses, "Wherefore criest thou unto Me?" It seems quite the opposite from the injunction of the Master, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint."

Yet this contradiction is only seemingly. In reality this verse of Scripture teaches the same truth as that injunction of Jesus in Luke 18: 1. Both teach that we must trust God implicitly. We must trust God and therefore pray continually. We also must trust God and accept the answer when it comes and act accordingly.

Moses had asked the Lord for his guidance, and the Lord had instructed him to encamp by the sea. God had told Moses also that the Egyptians would follow the Israelites and that they would attempt to destroy them, but He also had said, "I will be honored upon Pharaoh and upon all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."

That was enough for Moses. The answer to all his prayers had been given. And he also believed it, for he said to the people, "Fear not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you this day."

And yet, when the time came to act upon the promise of God and to believe the answer that God had already given, Moses was wavering. And instead of acting he went on praying.

That prayer was not wanted by God, for it was not a sign of faith but rather an expression of doubt. Moses had been "knocking" and the "door" was opened unto him, but there was some doubt in his soul, so that instead of entering the door that God had opened, he kept still knocking as though the door was yet closed. And therefore comes this rebuking question of Jehovah: "Wherefore criest thou unto Me?"

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We see then that **our prayers may be out of season.** While there is always reason to pray, it may be that there is no reason to pray a certain particular prayer. We must watch for the answers that God gives. And when He has answered our prayer, but we believe not the answer—perhaps because we cannot fully understand it—then it becomes shameful disobedience and God-dishonoring unbelief if we still keep praying about the matter. When we ask of God, we must

also be ready to receive, and when the answer comes, faith must accept it. If we ask something of God that we are convinced is proper to ask and expedient for us to receive, we must never quit praying about it until the answer comes; but when the answer does come, we must believe it and act upon it.

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Now, this is something that is quite often forgotten. God has answered many a prayer to some of us, and still we perhaps keep on praying as though He had not answered us at all. And consequently God does not listen with favor to our prayer. He shuts his ear to it, and somehow we feel that heaven is as of brass. Our prayer does not reach the throne, and we are, perhaps, wondering why it is, while all the time we refuse to see that God has answered long ago. God casts our prayers back in our face sometimes because they are not wanted, and they are not wanted because they are answered. And yet we keep on praying as though God had not answered. How unbelieving, how God-dishonoring are such prayers therefore. Well might God say to us: "Wherefore criest thou unto Me?"

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There are very many ways in which we may become guilty of praying out of season.

We have prayed and are praying for material prosperity, but adversity has been our portion in life, and we think that God has not answered our prayer while, in reality, He has been laboring to give us greater prosperity by keeping from us the lesser; He would give us soul prosperity through life's adversity, and we have not accepted his answer.

We have, perhaps, prayed for soul prosperity and God has sent us sickness and sorrow, and we think that God has not answered. And yet He would use these afflictions as means to give us what we asked for. But we have not accepted the answer.

We have prayed that the Lord might make us useful for his cause and Kingdom—we would do some work for Him—and God has placed us somewhere in a home or in a shop

where we might be constantly sowing the seed of the Gospel. But we have not accepted God's answer, for it was not according to our notion; it did not come as we would have it.

We have prayed that God would lead our children to Him and to his blessed service, and the Lord has placed within our reach such means as He would use to answer our prayers, but we are not using those means; we want God to answer our prayers without these means; we perhaps want Him to use no means at all. And so we think that God is not answering, while all the time the answer is right there for us to take hold of.

We are praying that God might remember the poor and the needy, and God has given us the means to supply their want. But we refuse to use these means; we just want to pray and we don't want to act.

We have been praying for opportunities and for blessings, and God has put them at our very door and in our homes; but we have been like the man that was seeking the horse while he was riding it.

Yes, we must always pray, and faint not, but **we must be looking for the answer** also. And we must **leave it to God how He will answer.**

Let us see to it, that we are not "asking amiss," that we are not asking what is not permissable to ask, or that we do not ask in the wrong way. Let us not lay conditions upon God, telling Him how we want Him to answer our prayers. Pray always, and faint not. Be sure that the answer will come and look for it. **And quit praying for it when the answer has come.** When God has answered, even when He did so in a way entirely contrary to our expectations, we must make use of the answer: we must act. When God is dividing the Red Sea for us, as it were, our prayer must give place to action and praise. Let us not dishonor God with prayers that are out of season.

XV

HOW OUR PRAYERS MAY BE HINDERED

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Ps. 66: 18
"That your prayers be not hindered." 1 Pet. 3: 7b

Sin has put us out of harmony with God. So long as sin stands between our soul and God there can be no harmony, and so long as we wish to keep sin on hand there can be no communion with God in prayer. Sin cuts us off from contact with the throne of God.

This is a truth that is not sufficiently recognized by many of God's people. There are sometimes all kinds of sins in their life, and they just act as though it made no difference to God. They often would make it appear before men as if they still had uninterrupted communion with God, while they regard iniquity in their heart and practice it in their life.

Very few children of God seem to realize what effect sin has upon their prayer, and still fewer will admit the awful fact that their prayers are immediately hindered when there is sin in their life that is not hated and confessed.

God is a holy God. He will receive sinners and He will listen to and answer the prayers of his very imperfect children; but there is one condition: they must hate sin. With regard to our prayers the word of the Lord is applicable: "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me." It is true what Isaiah said to Israel, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (59: 2).

Again I say many of God's children do not seem to realize this. Each of us knows from our own experience, perhaps, how we tried to keep up our prayer while there was sin between us and the Lord, some well known wrong that we did not humbly confess. We did "regard iniquity in our heart," and we knew it to be there, and yet we tried to get our prayers to reach God's throne, thinking that God would overlook the matter. But the Lord did not do that; He "will not

hear" under such circumstances of willful attempts to cover sin before his face. And, though we tried hard and long, "our prayers were hindered," prayer would not flow from our lips, and even if it came from our lips, it did not come from the heart.

Let us not deceive ourselves in this matter, for the Lord will not hear us if we regard iniquity in our heart. You can't make God listen to you. And you commit an awful sin when you come to God with iniquity in your heart. You thereby insult God, for you act as if He were not holy enough to take notice of your sin. No greater insult can be done to God than to close your eyes and bend your knees and fold your hands—like a humble and penitent supplicant—while all the time while you speak to God you "regard iniquity in your heart." God may not strike you dead while you are doing this, like He did Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, but the terrible judgment upon these two priests shows us warningly that God is a holy God and that we must not regard (esteem, love, cherish, protect) iniquity in our heart when we come to God in prayer. Prayer will be **hindered** if iniquity is regarded in the heart; it will neither be offered aright nor receive an answer.

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Prayers may be hindered for many reasons.

The Apostle Peter speaks of the relation between husband and wife. And he says that prayer may be hindered if they do not live right toward one another.

The evil to which he refers has always been a source of hindrance in prayer. In many a Christian home the relation between husband and wife, and consequently the whole home atmosphere, is far from the biblical ideal. Many a Christian home is the scene of jealousies and contentions, of strife and bickerings, so that it looks more like a home where evil spirits rule than a home in which the fear of God dwells. And even in many other homes, where common sense keeps the members of the family from living in open trouble, there is a lack of kindness and affection between husband and wife and between parents and children whereby prayer that is acceptable with God becomes a total impossibility.

Another thing that is a great hindrance in prayer is the lack of brotherly love among the believers. The Lord Jesus emphasizes it very strongly that love must be the rule among the household of faith. Harsh looks and unkind words are quite common among believers who claim to be one in Christ and who in their inner chamber seek communion at the same throne of grace. There is a disposition among Christians to take offence at the least little thing that comes up which runs contrary to their desires and ambitions, and there is often a spirit of unforgiveness, as if they never had read Matt. 5: 23, 24; 6: 14, 15; 18: 19-35. Some Christians can live at odds with fellow-believers for years and yet they have the brazen audacity to call upon the name of God in prayer. O, what an effrontery before the Holy One, who has said of all such, "When you stretch out your hands, I will shut my eyes; when you make many prayers, I will shut my ears." Remember, that prayer cannot be offered when a hot tempest of passion reigns in your soul, nor can God listen to your so-called prayers when your soul is as cold as an icicle toward your fellow-brother or sister.

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Besides these two great hindrances in prayer there are a great many others. These two are perhaps the most general and they are the least considered to be obnoxious in the eyes of God. But there are very many more, all having their cause in the dark recesses of our sinful and selfish soul.

And just as a telephone or telegraph wire carries no message when that wire is pulled down somewhere so that it touches the ground, so communication is cut off between the throne of God and our soul when we allow sin to drag us down. The wire of prayer is then "grounded," and it never reaches God's throne in his favor.

Let us get the hindrances out of the way. Let us not attempt to pray when we don't want to have the hindrances removed. Our prayer would be worse than hypocrisy; it would be wilful insult to God. It would be trying to blindfold the Lord. And we cannot do that. We can bring a curse upon ourselves, but we cannot deceive God.

And, as something may be hindering our prayer which

we have not yet detected, let us pray: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

XVI

LACK OF PRAYER

1. Caused by Our Carnal Nature

"Ask and it shall be given you."
Matt. 7: 7
"Ye have not, because ye ask not."
Jas. 4: 2

We all know by experience how uncomfortable and sickening it is to be in a room where there is lack of air. We spend no longer time in such a room than we have to, and as soon as we get outside of its walls into the fresh air we take a long, deep breath. And then we say, "I pity the people who have to live in that choky, sickening atmosphere, and I thank God for the fresh and bracing air."

And yet, while hardly a person would care to live in a room where fresh air is lacking, scores of Christians live in a spiritual atmosphere that is worse than the worst tenement hole that ever was called a home. There are Christians in great number who hardly ever get a breath of fresh air for their soul. It is the stale, murky, foul air of the spiritual tenement that they breathe day after day. They are shut in. They live in the shadow and in foul dampness. The heavenly air and stirring winds do not reach them. There is no sunshine, and consequently no light and happiness in their soul. Outwardly they may sometimes manage to keep up a good appearance, so that the passerby is given the impression that light and sunshine and fresh air are abundant, while inside of their soul is nothing but darkness and misery.

The trouble with such Christians is that the windows of their souls are not open. The air can't get in. In other

words, they suffer for lack of prayer. For it is prayer that opens the soul to the pure air that surrounds the very throne of God. It is prayer that brings the winds of the Spirit to the soul, causing the murky, foul, choking air of sin to be dispelled. Lack of prayer shuts out the air of heaven. Lack of prayer is the cause of spiritual despair. Lack of prayer in some cases causes semi-consciousness, so that the deplorable condition of the life of the soul is not even realized, just as some poor denizens of the sunless tenement seem not to be aware of their state. And the awful sad part of it is that so many Christians, perhaps most of them, live in that deplorable spiritual condition; that their life is almost choked for lack of air, caused by lack of prayer.

That this is so needs no argument. The condition that I just referred to is so prevalent and it is so pronounced that no earnest Christian mind will need further proof. Nor is it necessary to speak in detail of the seriousness of this spiritual malady. And neither is there any need of showing that the **general cause is lack of prayer.** Did not Jesus say, "Ask and it shall be given you," and did He not urge his people to pray without ceasing, assuring them that God would surely hear and richly bless them? And did not the Holy Spirit say through James, "Ye have not, because ye ask not"? Lack of prayer is, without doubt, the great cause of the sad condition of many Christian souls.

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Now let us very seriously consider a few causes for this lack of prayer.

Remember that we are not now thinking of **hindrances in prayer,** which were considered previously. We are thinking now of **lack of prayer,** and must find some reasons for that.

One of the first and main reasons for lack of prayer and the subsequent spiritual darkness and lifelessness is the **carnality of our nature.** Sin has so spoiled our taste for real, heavenly, life-giving things and has so filled us with desires for the material, sensual things of the world that the natural desires are contrary to this exercise and life of prayer. And so strong is this natural tendency that even children of God easily fall back into the old habit of living without

prayer and without air. So that, while conscious of the fact that they need this air and must seek it in prayer, they are overpowered by the contrary desire for the atmosphere of sin. It is like people having windows in their house to let the air in, but who don't like to take the trouble to open them. They will say, Yes, the windows ought to be open to let in some air, but they don't get up and open them. Just so do many Christians. They will say: Yes, I know, I ought to seek God in prayer much more than I do; I know that every blessing is from Him and that 'He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not;' I know that it is my fault and not God's that my spiritual life is so barren and gloomy." And yet these very same Christians will live on and on in that same spiritual condition until finally even the consciousness of their terrible spiritual poverty is dulled by continual neglect of prayer. "They have not because they ask not."

If any of my readers is in that deplorable condition, I urge you to immediately seek God's face; not merely with the acknowledgement that you have neglected your great Christian duty and privilege, but seek God's face with the humble confession of the terrible sin of shutting out from your life the light of heaven. Pray God not merely for light, but pray Him above all for forgiveness, that you have been seeking the murkiness of sin and have neglected the grace of God, given upon prayer.

Remember that before God can show you his blessed grace and let his glorious countenance light your inner and outer life, you must, absolutely must, confess the sin of your carnality. Too many Christians have not taken this matter of neglecting prayer serious enough. They think that they can just step back to the higher plane of spiritual life where the soul communes with God and the Spirit lights the way. But that cannot be done. The soul that has neglected this great and gracious privilege of seeking God in prayer must come back to God as the prodigal came back, who said: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee and I am no more worthy to be called thy son."

My Christian friend, when you do not live in constant fellowship with God through prayer, you have not merely

robbed yourself of great blessings, but you have also despised these blessings, and you have chosen the husks of the world instead. That must be penitently confessed before the Lord. And then you may again "ask and it shall be given you." And then you shall find that the Father has the rich banquet of heavenly bounties spread for you.

XVII
LACK OF PRAYER
2. Satan as a Cause of It

"Ask and it shall be given you."
Matt. 7: 7
"Ye have not, because ye ask not."
Jas. 4: 2

A second reason or cause for lack of prayer—very closely related to the first which, as we have seen, was the carnality of our nature—is the influence of Satan.

Satan, the great adversary of God and of God's people, who himself refused to honor God, but rebelled against Him, is trying hard to keep people away from the throne of God. And that great enemy of our soul has more to do with the deplorable fact of lack of prayer among God's people than we realize.

There has been a time when Christian people thought a great deal more seriously about the dangers of Satan's influence than they do today. His cunningness and the hidiousness of his character were often pictured in sermons and writings in a manner that was intended to create a strong revolt and great fear of him. Undoubtedly this was often exaggerated, so that sometimes the opposite effect was made upon some minds than was intended.

But in our carnal, materialistic, unspiritual age people do not realize enough that Satan is not a myth, but a person, a person of "great power" and of the utmost evil design. Also children of God have to a large extent consigned Satan

and his host to obscurity, never realizing that he is the ready partner and often the powerful director of our carnal mind and the desires of the flesh.

The Word of God gives us many warnings against Satan and his wiles; it admonishes us to remember that we have to fight against him and that we need the "whole armour of God" if we are to "stand against the principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places." And after the apostle has given a description of this armour of God, he goes on to say: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching there unto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6: 10-18). In order to pray we must fight, for the devil blocks the way to the throne of God; we must wrestle against him, for he will not easily go out of our way.

We need not enumerate in what various ways Satan is trying to keep God's children from praying right. These schemes of Satan are legion. We even read in Dan. 10: 13 that the answer to Daniel's prayer was delayed for twenty-one days because Gabriel, the messenger of God, was held back so long by the "prince of the kingdom of Persia" and could only succeed in coming to Daniel with God's answer when "Michael, one of the chief princes," came to Gabriel's assistance. And in verse 20 of that same chapter the angel Gabriel says: "And now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia." Dr. Scofield in his reference Bible very aptly remarks here: "The intimation is clear that as the holy angels are sent forth in behalf of the heirs of salvation, so demons are concerned in behalf of the world-system of Satan." If then Satan and his angels try to prevent God's holy messengers from serving God's people in answer to their prayer, how much more will it be true that these same evil spirits will do all in their power to keep us from praying. No wonder then that Paul exhorts us, as does also our Lord Jesus Christ, to "watch in prayer."

Satan doesn't want us to pray, and at every prayer that we make he is busy to prevent it or to spoil it. Therefore we find in Scripture so many intimations of Satan's presence and activity when God's children pray. As the devil sneaked

in when "the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord" in the days of Job (1: 7; 2: 1), so he has done ever since when any soul has tried to lift up itself to God in prayer.

See it also in the life of our Lord. When He was in the wilderness in prayer and fasting, and when He was praying in Gethsemane, Satan was there with his fierce temptations. Also in both instances the good angels were present to serve and strengthen the Lord.

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Watch therefore this mighty adversary, Satan, and seek divine aid when you pray.

Watch him, that he does not ensnare you in his nets of formalism, so that your heart is not in it when your lips move and when you are speaking to God.

Watch him, that he does not scatter the seeds of doubt and unbelief in your soul, so that your prayer is not "the prayer of faith."

Watch him, that he does not cause you to become despondent, by telling you that God will not hear your prayer.

Prayer is your greatest weapon against the devil, therefore he uses all his diabolical influence to prevent it or to cause your prayers to be evil. The devil himself knows what a powerful weapon prayer is. Therefore this renegade angel fears it and tries to choke it off. And therefore you must watch and pray.

Let us not be so influenced by him that we no longer "pray without ceasing." On the other hand, knowing his wiles to be many, and his power to be great, let us more than ever seek the power of Almighty God against this great adversary.

When the thought comes into our mind that perhaps we will not be heard, or that prayer is not of much avail, or that we can as well postpone praying when the season is more convenient or when we "feel like it," then is the time that we should be on our guard against Satan. Then is the time to "pray without ceasing."

People of God, remember that the time has not yet come that "the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (Rev. 12: 10). He is yet among us. And, though his power is limited, yet he has "great wrath," because he "knoweth that he hath but a short time."

God had called our attention to this enemy as He exhorts us to use our children's prerogative. He says: "Watch and pray." If we forget or neglect to do that, our adversary will wield diabolical influence over our life and cause us untold misery.

But if, in the name of Him who conquered sin and Satan, we bow humbly before the Father's throne, we shall find his rich storehouse of grace open to us; and when we ask it shall be given unto us, even when legions of devils should try to prevent it.

XVIII

LACK OF PRAYER

3. The World as a Cause of It.

"Ask and it shall be given you."
Matt. 7: 7
"Ye have not, because ye ask not."
Jas. 4: 2

A third and final reason which we mention as a cause for lack of prayer in the life of many of God's people is **the influence of the world.** And by that I do not mean so much the corruptions and evils of those that live heart and soul in the world, as I mean worldly habits and the worldly tenor and mode of modern life.

It is more difficult now to live close to God and to commune with Him in prayer, as it was a century or more ago. Modern life has become so complicated and everything is rushed along at such tremendous speed, that a very large

number of Christians have fallen into a deplorable neglect of prayer.

True, the rush and hurry and worry of modern life should not be an excuse for any Christian who finds that his prayers are becoming fewer and less ardent. Every Christian must also watch against this enemy of our soul. But it is true, notwithstanding, that the life of many a Christian is so extremely rushed and crowded, that it almost inevitably has crowded out his prayers.

Not only is this true of Christians that live in busy cities, but also the hamlet and the country has lost its air of quiet and peace; even there the feverish, rushing spirit of the age has made its inroads and has caused restlessness and haste in almost every home and heart.

Everything in regard to time is measured by minutes, and even by seconds. Every member of the family is saying "hurry up" to the other members. There is hardly any day that a person can say that he got ready with the day's work. We are living in such a continual rush that "a man hardly has time to stop and tie his shoestring, and we are allowing the rush of things to steal our minds away from God."

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These things ought not to be so.

For one thing, the Christian should not model his life after the example of those that merely live for this world. He must so conduct his business in this world, that there is opportunity for quiet meditation and prayer. He may not burden himself with so many cares, and he may not allow himself to become so entwined in the complicated affairs of the world, that the time for communion with God is shortened by it, or that the quiet preparation of his soul to meet his God becomes an impossibility. "This sore travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised (afflicted) therewith" (Eccl. 1: 13), but God's children have other things, higher things to occupy their minds. They must "seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness," and therefore also seek constant communion with their Father in prayer.

A Christian, therefore, before entering upon any task in life, must first consider whether it will interfere with his

prayer-life. If it does, he must try to overcome it or quit. Not every kind of business is the business for a Christian to be engaged in. Nor is every method of conducting one's business or daily affairs the right method for a Christian to follow.

It is sometimes said that one can pray everywhere, and even while busily working at some speed-requiring task. That is true. But it is very doubtful whether they that say this are practicing it. And even if they are seeking God in prayer between the busy and nervous customers in their shop or behind the desk in the office, or at any other place where they may be working at their appointed task, there should be some time left when each Christian seeks God in the quietude of his home sanctuary. We must be alone with God on the mountain of prayer. We must seek to be away from all rush and hurry, and spend a goodly portion of the time in communion with the Father. The Christian that does not do that is robbing himself of the greatest blessing that a man can obtain in this world. He is bringing his soul to a condition where it exists on starvation rations.

Very often nowadays Christian people will be saying that they have no time for a certain work in the interest of God's kingdom. I would say: make time for it by seeking God in prayer. As a rule, Christians that have not time for any work in the church or in the interest of God's kingdom are those that do not pray much. Our Lord was sometimes so busy that He found no time to eat, but He always found time to pray and often spent a while night in prayer. Let not the influence of the world and the pressure of modern life rob you of the best in your earthly life: your communion with God. And say not that you have no time for prayer, for you would not be telling the truth.

"No time to pray!
Oh, who so fraught with earthly care
As not to give to humble prayer
Some part of day?

"No time to pray!
'Mid each day's dangers, what retreat
More needful than the mercy seat?
Who need not pray?

"No time to pray!
Must care of business' urgent call
So press us as to take it all,
Each passing day?

What thought more drear
Than that our God his face should hide,
And say, through all life's swelling tide,
No time to hear!"

Christians, watch these three enemies of our soul and of prayer: **our sinful, carnal nature; Satan and his allies; the influence of the world.**

XIX

FIXED SEASONS OF PRAYER

"As for me, I will call upon God;.... evening and morning, and at noon will I pray." Ps. 55: 16, 17

"And his windows being open toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God." Dan. 6: 10

The very easiest form of worship is prayer. It requires no great learning, nor is it necessary to use many words. It is merely the believing soul speaking to God.

Yet one greatly undervalues the sacredness and solemnity of prayer, and its meaning in the life of a Christian, if he should consider prayer of little importance, or if he should

consider prayer of little importance, or if he should think that any kind of prayer is right.

Because prayer is communion with God, speaking with lips of faith and hearts of thankfulness; and because all traces of formality, ceremony and servility should be absent, therefore it requires the deepest reverence and the most child-like simplicity.

Consequently we cannot pray right, when we pray in a haphazard way. We must not before time invent and formulate our prayers, but we must be in a **prayerful attitude.** Our soul must be trained for this simple worship, so that our prayer is indeed **communion with God.**

And one of the best ways of right training of the soul for prayer is to have **fixed seasons of prayer,** to pray at set times of the day, and never to depart from it. As our body has become accustomed to set times of eating and drinking, so our soul ought to be trained to the habit of praying at regular intervals.

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To have fixed seasons of prayer was the custom of all earnest, God-fearing Israelites. There are many examples of this kind in Scripture, and the general exhortation of the Lord sems to indicate that this custom was approved of by Him. We may be reasonably sure that it was not merely a custom of the pious Israelites, but generally recommended by the priests and prophets.

The Scripture verses upon which our present meditation is based refer to two incidents of this kind. Let us just look at them.

It is **David,** the man after God's own heart, who speaks in Ps. 55 and says: "As for me, I will call upon God." He speaks here of the wicked who were plotting against him, trying to do all the mischief they could. And the chief actor in this plotting was a former close friend of David (perhaps he refers to Ahithopel.) Now he says that he would not follow their course by counterplots, but he would commit himself to the Lord, and He is sure that the Lord will hear him. And

then he further says: "Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray." Even while sorely oppressed and perhaps fleeing from his treacherous enemies he would continue his customary prayers at the regular season.

Nothing could swerve him from his habit of seeking the Lord in prayer at fixed seasons of the day. He would begin the day with God as usual (evening was the beginning of the Jewish day), and commit himself to the Keeper of Israel, who neither sleeps nor slumbers. In the morning, as he arose from his sleep, his heart he would lift up in prayer to God. And at noon, in the heat of day and sometimes in the midst of affliction, he would again turn to the God of his salvation, who had delivered his soul and who would also deliver him from his human enemies. So we see that David could not be induced to change his custom of praying at regular times of the day. And remember that these three seasons of the day do not have anything to do with the meal-times, as is often thought; these were seasons of prayer when David sought his God in quiet and alone.

The other example of prayer at fixed seasons is that of Daniel the prophet. He was at the court of King Darius in Babylon. Everybody knew that an "excellent spirit" was in Daniel. There was none in the whole kingdom so wise and of so great service to the king than this captive Jew, Daniel. And, as it usually does, this superiority of Daniel roused the hatred of other men at the court. They tested him at every point in order that they might find some irregularity in his conduct on which to base their demand for his downfall; but they "could find none occasion or fault, forasmuch as he was faithful."

Finally they conclude that they could only find occasion against Daniel in the matter of his religion, and perhaps they also somewhat understood that it was Daniel's religion that made him the excellent man that he was. So they plotted to his downfall along that line. They appealed to the vanity of their king by proposing that he assume the role of God for thirty days, and sign an edict whereby no man was allowed to ask anything of any God. Of course, Daniel was

not mentioned in this writing, but the whole decree was nothing but a trap for Daniel.

But a man that fears God cannot be put down by human decrees. Daniel went on praying as usual. Many a Christian would have said: "I will not pray openly and at the regular seasons of prayer now. I can as well pray in secret, and I can as well pray at some other time, when nobody is watching me." Not so Daniel. You may call Daniel a fanatic if you like; it makes no difference to him. They can kill him if they desire to do so, but he will pray as usual, and he will not even close his window. He does not debate the matter at all; he just goes on as usual. Only two considerations enter into his soul: the first is that he must obey God rather than man, and the second is that even if they kill his body, they cannot do more than that; they cannot touch his soul. Daniel was looking after the honor of his God and after the welfare of his own soul. Therefore he would not suspend his prayer for thirty days or even for one day. Yea, he would not even neglect his custom of praying at regular seasons.

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Let us have these two examples of prayer-at-fixed-seasons before our mind. They certainly show us the need of it. And they show us also the blessed result of it. Have your fixed seasons and do not depart from the custom.

And let us also have another example before our mind. Look at that lonely figure going up the side of the mountain in Galilee toward the setting of the day and see Him come back in the early morning. He has spent the night in prayer. And his name is Jesus.

Again, see Him go to the Mount of Olives, his disciples following. It is the night of his betrayal, and He knows it. But He will not depart from his habit of prayer. He goes "as He was wont" (Luke 22: 39), and He is on his knees when the enemy was almost ready to lay hands on Him. Let us follow the Lord's example of prayer at fixed seasons.

XX
THE JOY AND COMFORT OF PRAYER

"I will make them joyful in my house of prayer." Isa. 56: 7

"And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, has not forsaken them that seek thee." Ps. 9: 10

Scores of God's admonitions to pray are followed by promises of joy and comfort. The prayer of faith is not a solemn formality, but it is communion with the Father; it is making requests in the name of Christ. And such a prayer is never without effect. Even before that prayer is definitely answered, it has its blessed effect upon the believer. If our attitude to God is right, our talking to God and communion with God in prayer gives joy and comfort.

This is so even with a child that makes requests to its parents. The dutiful and obedient child finds it a joy to come to its parents with a request for something. And it derives great comfort from coming to its parents in seasons of trouble and sorrow to make those troubles known to them and to ask their help. Often before the answer is given or the request is granted, the face of such a child is lit with joy and the tears of trouble are dried up. The reason for it is that the child knows that its parents care for him, and that they will grant all legitimate requests that it is in their power to grant. And it knows that parents understand him and fully sympathize with him. And because of the love that has knit parents and child together that child derives joy and comfort from the mere presence of its parents.

Now, it is the great privilege of every child of God to come to the Lord in prayer and find Him to be a constant source of joy and comfort. The Lord has put himself, as it were, at the disposal of his children, and they are invited, and even urged, to come to Him with their desires and their troubles. And He has assured them that He will make them joyful, and He will not forsake them that seek Him. He may

not answer our prayers in just the way that seemed best to us. He may keep us waiting for the answer for a short or even a long period. But "the Lord is mindful" of his children, and when they come to Him in a humble, childlike attitude, He makes them welcome. And He will assure them in their heart that it is pleasing to Him that they put their trust in Him and seek Him.

Of course, a worldly-minded person will not understand this kind of logic. The worldly-minded heart is like the disobedient, wilful child; it has no affection for its parents. All it cares for is to have its desires granted immediately. But the affectionate child enjoys the presence of its parents. It finds so much pleasure in the presence of its parents that it will often come to them to talk with them. It desires communion, more than it desires certain things that it asks for. The greatest gift to an affectionate child is the love of its parents, and it enjoys that most when it can be with them and talk with them.

It is exactly so with God's children when they are in the right attitude to their Father. Prayer is to them a never-failing source of joy and comfort. The thought of communing with their Father so elates them that they will avail themselves of almost every opportunity to speak with Him. It is true what Christmas Evans once said: "Prayer is the rope up in the belfry: we pull it, and it rings the bell up in heaven." Sure, and the music of that bell floods the soul with joy, for it is the Father that speaks through it. Christians who were leaders in the Church of Christ and in other walks of life, were all men that derived their joy and comfort and their strength for the work they performed, in tolling the bell and listening for its sound. They did not count it time lost, but time saved when they spent hours in prayer to their heavenly Father. Luther said once: "I have so much to do that I cannot get along with less than three hours a day of praying." It was prayer that put the sunshine in their life and that gave them strength for the duties and conflicts of life.

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Are we getting that joy and comfort out of prayer? If not, we should be looking for the reasons for it.

Perhaps we are not praying at fixed seasons. It may be that we are not taking our "spiritual morning bath" regularly. Sir Matthew Hale said: "If I omit praying and reading God's Word in the morning, nothing goes well all day."

"Just a word with Jesus before the day begins;
Just a plea for guidance a day of blessing wins;
Just a moment's waiting in silence at his feet;
Just to hear Him whisper his words of counsel sweet."

Irregularity in the habits of prayer is a very common reason for not getting joy and comfort out of prayer. We must keep our appointments with our God more strictly than we do with our employers or associates in business.

Or we may be overburdened with labors, so that we are living under a continual strain. It may be that our mind is in such a hurried state that we cannot think and speak to God quietly and calmly. If that is the case, we must get some of these things off our mind, and it may even be necessary to change our occupation.

Or it may be that we are trying to serve two masters. That is true of many Christians today, I fear. Of course, the comfort of prayer can never be ours while we remain in that state. Prayer must be a burden; it certainly cannot be a joy. Our duty then is to break away from the other master and serve Christ only. Our prayer should be for mercy and forgiveness, and our cry to God must be: "Break down ev'ry idol; cast out ev'ry foe."

Let us seek more the joy and comfort of prayer. There is none like it.

May God grant it to his people in an ever increasing measure.

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"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

END

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